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A NEW LOOK AT THE BIBLE TRADITION

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A New Look at the Bible Tradition

by

LOUIS V. BISCHOFF

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New York

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 62-21556

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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PREFACE

We have sought God and religious values through the eyes and upon the shoulders of the past long enough. I am convinced that if we would attain a more adequate idea of God and a religion that is at once more vital and more meaningful, we must repudiate and discard the guesses of the past and look instead, largely within ourselves, for answers that are less bizarre and less absurd (and less immoral) than those provided by traditional evangelical Christianity, Orthodox Judaism, and other "religions" that were established in ancient times, like Buddhism, Mohammedanism, etc.

Many long centuries ago, widely separated groups of men decided that they had discovered (through "revelation" or by "divine inspiration") the ultimate truths about God and religion and each of these groups claimed it had God's unique favor and sponsorship. Unfortunately, the revelations purportedly received by the early Hebrew seers, and the revelations transmitted to Buddhist disciples before them, and similarly the supposedly inspired revelations channelled to a later group who called themselves "Christians" differed from the revelations of the rest.

In consequence, it would appear to be evident that either God was attempting to confuse his creatures by providing contrary revelations to different groups, or that the claims made by the various groups were mistaken, and that the ostensible revelations that each group had received were merely the inventions of honestly deluded or ignorant men, or the wilful pretensions of wily men who sought to obtain thereby power over their fellows.

Like Judaism, evangelical Christianity closed the door on the search for religious truth centuries ago. The truth is, about two thousand years ago, the proponents of Judaism and Christianity decided that they had found the final answers and that the search for religious truth was over. The reader is invited to imagine what a primitive world men would still live in today if the search for truth had been similarly abandoned twenty centuries ago in the fields of medicine, agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, construction, or chemistry.

I am tempted to reflect upon the progress that men might have achieved in human relations and toward peace, had they been willing to maintain an open mind in their search for religious truth as well, instead of stubbornly clinging to ancient religious prejudices that serve only to divide and segregate men of good will, prejudices that actively deny the very brotherhood that all world religions loudly and insistently proclaim.

I suggested above that we must look largely within ourselves for the ultimate truths, making use of that intuition, or divine touchstone implanted in all of us, for right. I feel certain that each of us is potentially capable of the same deep insights into ethics and religion as were Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, or any of the other great religious teachers of the world.

Each of us, like Moses, can—in a manner of speaking—see God face to face, or become aware of Him in a bush, aflame, if not with common or supernatural fire, then certainly on fire with an overpowering beauty which to the practiced or sensitive eye of the poet is the handwriting of God. Expressed more prosaically, the beauty and organization we discern here and elsewhere may be taken as mute but deeply eloquent evidence of a vast Intelligence that is to all appearances at work at the heart of the Universe. The merest flower in the crannied wall, we may be sure, is not rooted altogether, or ultimately, in blind chance:

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out . . . root and all . . .
> If I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is.
> —*Tennyson* (1869)

Again, each of us can conduct his life upon the high ethical principles which our concept of God symbolizes, and can endeavor to practice good will and loving kindness amongst our fellows and perhaps earn to some minute degree the right to be called one of God's children, as Jesus and many another man of virtuous wisdom before him was called, as I believe, in a wholly figurative or allegorical sense, or in token of deep veneration and respect.

Still again, we can "find" God, so to speak, in the most ordinary circumstances or while we are engaged in the most commonplace acts, as for example Buddha did, while sitting under a bo-tree. Actually of course Buddha's thoughts were directed inwardly and the external circumstances attending his discovery of "God" or what he concluded was the very heart of religion were of no real consequence or had no direct bearing on the discovery he made. Each of us by looking within and exercising our own faculty of ethical intuition, can, like Buddha, find God too, even though the circumstances of our life compel us to spend our time in the busy and often tumultuous arena of life, rather than in a hermitage of solitude and quiet contemplation far removed from the madding crowd.

One of the great fallacies of traditional religious thought may be illustrated by the circumstances of what we have called Buddha's discovery of God. Because Buddha discovered God while sitting, "sitting" in Buddhism is regarded as a sacred posture for Buddha, and one may see in Buddhist temples an endless number of statues of sitting Buddhas. And because the discovery was made under a bo-tree, the bo-tree is regarded as sacred or held in sacred sort by those of Buddhist faith, just as the cross is regarded as an intrinsically sacred object by Christians because of the circumstance of Jesus' execution on a cross.

To my way of thinking (and I believe it is a rational way of thinking) no one object, just as no one posture—or place, or day, or book, or man—is more sacred than any other. As far as posture is concerned, one may worship God or exemplify the spirit of reverence far more effectively when one's body is in a posture not usually or traditionally associated with worship. For example, research chemists bending over their test-tubes in dedicated search for a cure of some human scourge like cancer, or college instructors at their lecterns or desks endeavoring to activate in their students a sense of beauty, or instill in them a greater love of truth, may be worshipping God more authentically than one who crouches low before an altar-stone, muttering prayers by rote.

When one is about an act of mercy or is engaged in some endeavor that has some measure of love or service in it, the soul is on its knees whatever the body's posture may be. This basic truth was indeed recognized centuries ago and was crystallized in the old and familiar Latin axiom "Laborare est orare" (to labor is to pray).

Because of the insidious and persistent fallacy of regarding some objects, postures, days, places, books and even some men as more sacred than other objects, postures, days, places, books and men, the religious or theological doctrines of the past are often patently absurd and contradictory and sometimes even immoral in their tendencies and implications, and because of these implications they are highly derogatory to God, libel His name, and do Him great dishonor. But putting aside the affront to God for the moment the serious thing for mankind about such doctrines is the circumstance (which history verifies) that these fallacious doctrines divide men of good will into hundreds of jealous or hostile "sectarian" camps each of which believes it alone nourishes or guards the "authentic" flame of sacred and eternal truth.

There is in my opinion no cogent reason why all men who believe in basic religious values (integrity, faith, high ethics, good will, dedication, love, lofty principles, etc.) should not be united as members of one great religious movement. For one thing, such men already all adhere to the same general code of honor and ethics—and worship the same God, albeit under different names. They are kept apart only by differing systems of theological "beliefs" borrowed or inherited from an ignorant and superstitious past, or sometimes—the more's the pity—they are kept apart only by linguistic or semantic confusion.

I am convinced that religion will eventually be fully emancipated from ancient error and entrenched sectarian prejudice, and certainly to help rid the world of religious intolerance and to help remove absurdities from religious practices and beliefs, and particularly to clear God's name in the process from the immoral and degrading implications intimately involved in the incredible doctrines attributed to Him by theology, were causes in themselves sufficiently compelling to invite our best efforts.

But now, even more urgent, is the need for all persons of good will to present a united front to the ideologies of negation which deny or scoff at the validity of ethical values, ideologies which are contending—and often with frightening success—for the possession of men's minds. Of far more concern to us, it seems to me, than the state of the world's missile and nuclear weaponry and defense, is the state of men's minds, and more particularly the state of their deep-down "religious" beliefs—beliefs, that is, by which they guide their lives and actions.

If men of genuine good will continue to remain at odds among themselves over rather ludicrous and contradictory religious beliefs (which are not "religious" beliefs at all, but air-drawn theological dogmas), we may be sure that whilst these men of good will, who together constitute a majority of mankind, stand each other off and scuffle over words, a mere handful of men of ill will and unholy ambition, armed to the teeth with negative ideologies, will continue to successfully pour their ideological poison into men's minds, and win millions by their single-minded devotion to the Communistic conspiracy.

Our devotion to basic religious values, I submit, should be equally enthusiastic, and our dedication to them sincere to the point of being willing to forego our often cocksure sectarian prejudices in favor of these more essential religious values, particularly if an examination of the grounds for sectarian prejudice, herein attempted, reveals their absurdity or invalidity.

The reader is asked to examine the evidence in the pages that follow with an open and impartial mind. It is quite conceivable, and I am hopeful even probable, that the evidence offered in these pages might be found to be sufficiently compelling and sufficiently conclusive, that the reader might not only feel amply justified in abandoning his own sectarian view of religion (if at present he harbors such a view), but also might feel a positive and urgent obligation to do so, either out of a proper reverence for God or because of a deep-seated aversion to pretense of any kind in religion.

In the pages that follow, my endeavor, among other things, is to clear away some of the old lumber of mere ecclesiasticism from the precincts of religion. These hallowed grounds have been so long burdened with the thorny brambles and matted jungle growth of stubborn dogmatism, superstitious ritualism, and arrogant sectarianism, that the valid and honest values of religion are all but hidden from view. Once the site is cleared of this ancient clutter, and these unessential adjuncts to religion are rooted out, perhaps we will then be in a position to plant, in the unencumbered soil, the seeds of a more vital religion.

The religion of the future will doubtless make far greater demands on each man's personal integrity, but it will be a religion that, by the same token, all men can be fiercely proud of. In the world today, we have much religiosity and but little religion, much churchianity and but little essential Christianity. This is borne out by the fact, to be observed on every hand, that our "religion" impinges but slightly, if at all, upon the everyday affairs of our lives. The respect that most of us pay to religion is only a token respect, much like that affectionately paid to the endearing Queen of England, more out of homage for the venerable imperial past she symbolizes than any present valid sovereignty.

Finally, as I see it, and as I have intimated previously, the forces of decency cannot go into the struggle with the forces of ideological negation if their religious armor is weakened by error, absurdity, or contention among themselves, or by outright neglect of the basic democratic principles that give religion its validity and strength. Our religious armor must be woven of evident truth and re-inforced by reason and burnished by constant use, to be able to withstand the often mocking assaults of negative philosophies, typified by the present-day Russian-fostered, cynical Communism.

Traditional religion as it stands today has not one, but many Achilles' heels, and this vulnerability to successful assault because of its often absurd and untenable doctrines, and its vulnerability to adverse criticism because it often does not in fact pursue the principles of brotherhood and tolerance it blatantly professes, can best be overcome by driving a shaft far below the divergent theologies that separate and estrange men of good will, down and into the molten core of basic religious truths divorced from the outlandish and anachronistic trappings of the doctrinaire theologies of the past.

Besides, only in this manner could we ever achieve, in place of our hundreds upon hundreds of segregated sectarian groups, the wider, more universal, and more truly democratic fellowship of love, where homage is paid not to dogma, denominationalism, accident of birth or wealth, but to integrity, goodness and honest merit, and a fellowship that embraces not Christians only, but Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, and all humanity.

We need a new concept of positive religion emancipated from the dead hand of the past, a religion freed from empty rituals and absurd doctrines that wake no universal and approving echoes in the heart; we need a religion which takes God and ethics in earnest, a religion in short which is no longer merely a round of empty formality and perfunctory lip service but rather a vital faith woven into the very pattern of our lives, to the end that religion may become, in fine, a blazing passion for right instead of the dull unenthusiastic devotion to ritual and creed to which it has so largely degenerated.

Without such a revitalized religion, the people of good will cannot achieve the brotherhood and effective democracy that is their heart's desire; and, tugged this way and that, they go into the ideological Armageddon of the Twentieth Century with their feet hobbled and their arms bound to their sides.

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Chapter One: Peter's Denial of Jesus

For a start, let us carefully examine the significance of Peter's "denial" as recorded in the Book which many Christians still conscientiously believe is—in a very literal sense—the Word of God. Peter's denial took place after Jesus had been seized and was haled before the high priest:

> Mark 14: 54 and Mark 14: 66-72 And Peter followed Jesus afar off, even into the palace of the high priest and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire. . . . And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little later, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them; for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth, But he began to curse and swear: I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. . . .

Peter, as can be seen, had three successive opportunities to affirm his allegiance to Jesus, but each time denied, becoming quite vehement in his third denial. Let this be borne in mind as we examine the many miracles and amazing events to which Peter was an eye-witness, according to the gospels which many Christians still accept as God's authentic Word.

God Himself for example, according to the Scriptures, declared within Peter's hearing that Jesus was His "Son"; yet despite this clear testimony by God, Peter denied Jesus. Lest anyone should doubt, permit me to quote the passage wherein this "Divine" testimony occurs:

> Matthew 17: 1-9 Jesus taketh PETER, James and John . . . and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart; and was transfigured before them. . . . And behold there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Jesus. . . . Then Peter said unto Jesus, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold a cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud which said: This is my beloved Son . . . and the disciples fell on their faces and were afraid. . . .

I cite the passage to offer Divine proof—and Divine it is if we insist on the Divine Authorship of the Bible—that Peter was present at what Christians the world over call the Transfiguration, and to offer what must be considered incontrovertible and unimpeachable evidence that Peter actually heard the Voice of God on the mountain top. In addition, he beheld Moses and Elias RISEN FROM THE DEAD. How Peter recognized these worthies we are not told, but there can be no doubt that he saw them; God's testimony (if it indeed be such) cannot be doubted or called into question.

Why then did Peter deny Jesus? We Christians of a later day are asked to affirm our allegiance to Jesus without ourselves having witnessed the miracles which Peter was permitted to witness, and without the direct assurance of God which Peter was ostensibly given. Yet despite his presence at such wondrous events as would have been more than sufficient to convince the most skeptical or dubious amongst us, Peter three times refused to openly affirm his alliance with Jesus.

Again, were we later-day Christians permitted to see just one person freed from the bonds of death and risen from the corruption of the grave, our faith would no longer be faith, but certainty. Yet on the occasion quoted above Peter saw TWO brought back from the dead, if we can believe what is purportedly God's Word. On still other occasions, similarly "divinely" corroborated, he saw dead persons "raised" and restored to normal life. For verification, we quote the following Marcan passages:

> Mark 5: 22-24, and Mark 5: 35-42 There cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name . . . and fell at Jesus' feet and besought him greatly, saying, My daughter lieth at the point of death: come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed, and she shall live. . . . While Jesus yet spake to the woman who touched the hem of his garment while he passed through the throng and was therewith healed of an illness she had had twelve years, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain messengers which said, Thy daughter is dead. . . . As soon as Jesus heard he saith to the ruler, Be not afraid, only believe . . . and he suffered no man to follow him save PETER and James and John . . . and he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue . . . and when he was come in, he saith . . . The damsel is NOT dead, but sleepeth . . . They laughed him to scorn, but when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, AND THEM THAT WERE WITH HIM (which included Peter), and entered in where the damsel was lying and he took her by the hand and said . . . I say unto thee, Rise, and straightway the damsel arose, and walked . . . and they were astonished with a great astonishment. . . .

I have quoted at length to establish Peter's presence at this apparent "resurrection" of the 12-year old daughter of Jairus. Witnessing such an act would, for most mortals, have been sufficient of itself to change faith to certainty, or to establish unswerving devotion, yet despite Peter's presence at this truly phenomenal event (which we are told filled all who witnessed it "with a great astonishment"), Peter's belief in Jesus never grew to firm conviction, and he consequently "denied" him.

Does it seem possible or credible that anyone who had witnessed such miracles at the hand of Jesus could deny him? The only reasonable and natural explanation seems to be that Peter did not in fact witness these miracles because then and only then would his denial of Jesus become credible. It is incredible—a prodigy beyond belief—to accept it as a fact that Peter witnessed these wonders AND YET denied Jesus.

In the passage cited immediately above, a further wonder is recorded which Peter witnessed also; namely, the healing of a woman when she but touched the hem of Jesus' garment. What further proof could Peter have needed after this? If we accept the Bible as God's Word, we must believe that this healing took place, for it is recorded by One whose testimony it would be irreverent to doubt. A miracle occurred here without any overt act on the part of Jesus while he was on the way to perform the greater miracle (if any miracle can be adjudged "greater" than another).

Incidentally, a piece of sculpture has come down to us from ancient Greece which shows the so-called Greek "Savior" and healer, Aesculapius, and with him a woman in the act of kneeling with her hand touching his garment. Perhaps a tradition or belief existed long before the birth of Jesus that merely touching the garment of a "divine" healer (for Aesculapius too was esteemed divine) would bring about the cure of one's infirmity or malady.

The author of Mark may well have known of this popular tradition regarding a healer's garment and welded it into his account of Jesus, to corroborate his implied contention that Jesus was indeed a divine healer too and, as in the case of other such healers, even the very clothing he wore had healing power. This hidden implication would naturally have force with his readers who (we may guess) were as familiar as Mark was with this popular notion of early pagan times and vaguely believed it to be true.

In the above paragraph we asserted that Aesculapius was "esteemed divine," and we might add it was for a very good reason, for he (like

Jesus) was begotten by the Supreme Deity (in his case the Supreme Deity of the Greek world) and he too was born, like Jesus, of a human mother (Coronis). Soon after his birth too, people were said to have flocked from all quarters to behold the infant Aesculapius.

In our remarks about Aesculapius above, we also called him "Savior," an epithet usually reserved by Christians for Jesus alone, but the fact is that Aesculapius was—centuries earlier—so called, and the temple erected at Athens to his memory was known as "the Temple of the Savior." Further, to substantiate his miraculous healings, we quote the words of an early Christian Father, Justin Martyr. These words are taken from his famous "Apology" (=Defense), addressed to the Roman Emperor Hadrian:

> As to our Jesus curing the lame and the paralytic and such as were crippled from birth, this is exactly what you (pagans) say that your own Aesculapius did. . . .

Justin Martyr in this passage clearly acknowledges Aesculapius' miraculous powers. And while Eusebius, the famous ecclesiastical historian of early times attacks Aesculapius' healings, HE DOES NOT DENY THEM. He merely tries to undermine their validity by saying that while Jesus' miracles were achieved with divine assistance, those of Aesculapius were accomplished with the aid of Satan—by a rich irony apparently forgetting Jesus' own defense when his healings were similarly attacked and he too (like Aesculapius) was accused of healing with the aid of Satan:

> Mark 3: 22-26 And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said: Jesus hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth out devils. And Jesus . . . said unto them . . . how can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand. . . .

When we add that Aesculapius, like Jesus, is reported to have risen after death, a purported fact celebrated in the works of the Latin poet, Ovid, we may be justly dumbfounded. Ovid, in an apostrophe to the infant Aesculapius, exclaims:

> Hail, great Physician of the world! All hail!
> Hail mighty infant, who in years to come
> Shall heal the nations AND DEFRAUD THE TOMB!
>
> ……
>
> . . . shall die, but from the dark abode
> Shall RISE. . . .

Ovid was of course poetizing reports that had come down to him and accepting these reports at face value, or at least pretending (under poetic license) to do so, much as we—under the aegis of faith—today accept or pretend to accept similar reports regarding Jesus' resurrection, of which more will be said later.

Needless to say, the parallels in the lives of Aesculapius and Jesus are so many and so outstandingly similar, that some students and scholars have been led, quite reasonably, to believe that the fabulous things related about Aesculapius were borrowed by the gospellists when they proceeded to write about Jesus, and incorporated bodily by them into their own reports to impress prospective Christians, but had no basis in actual fact. A fable certainly does not become true or truer by repetition.

Peter might possibly be excused for his lack of faith in Jesus if he had seen only one wonder or one miraculous "sign" of his superhuman power, but we constantly see miracle piled on miracle, not alone in the passage quoted above (Mark 5: 22-42), but on many other occasions; as in the Transfiguration episode already referred to, where "God" assures us that Peter heard His voice, and saw Moses and Elias freed from the bonds of death. If we Christians accept the premise that the Bible is God's very Word, we must accept what is recorded as having actually happened.

But can we accept these events as true in the face of the denial of Jesus by one who was supposed to have witnessed the miracles recorded? For had Peter indeed witnessed such events, this monstrous denial could never have occurred or Peter must be regarded as a man who would not believe even the testimony of God Himself, nor the witness of his own senses, and a man who did not even believe the word of Jesus. For had not Jesus promised golden rewards to those who followed him faithfully?

> Mark 10: 28-30 Then Peter began to say unto Jesus, Lo, we have left all and have followed thee. And Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, wife, or lands for my sake . . . but he shall receive an hundredfold NOW IN THIS TIME, houses, brethren . . . and lands; . . . and in the world to come eternal life. . . .

Peter apparently regarded these as empty promises, or as promises that Jesus could not fulfill, and he had certainly lived intimately enough with Jesus and would—one would suppose—be a far better judge of Jesus' power and reliability than we. Yet we, who never were permitted to see with our own eyes the corroborations of Jesus' power that Peter was so amply granted, are asked to pledge whole-hearted allegiance to Jesus as a divine being, when Peter, who saw such countless absolute proofs, denied him. It boils down to this: we are asked to believe a string of printed words telling of such acts whereas Peter did not put any credence or faith in the very acts themselves.

Perhaps we should believe the recorded testimony of Jesus in the above-quoted passage telling of Jairus' daughter, rather than the interpretation put upon the event by the author of the gospel. Jesus said, "The damsel is NOT DEAD, but sleepeth." Perhaps THIS was the simple truth, and no miracle, as we understand the word, occurred. Perhaps the miracle lived only in the imaginations of those around Jesus. Then again, perhaps all of the miracles recorded were of this nature, being born in the fertile imaginations of Jesus' followers, and narrated by them to give added weight, and as they would have it appear, divine sanction to his ethical precepts and counsellings.

Apparently his followers were incapable of understanding that no "sign" was needed to guarantee or corroborate the validity of ethical truths. Such truths carry their own conviction because of their intrinsic merit, whether they are propounded by a Jesus, a Socrates, or a Shakespeare. Our God-given, inner ethical "sense" enables us to recognize, as it were instinctively, the valid rightness of such truths, and detect the falsity of those which lack universality and ethical purity.

Our churches today would do well to help us develop this in-born ethical sensitivity, rather than put so much unnecessary emphasis on ritual, creed, and doctrine. Unless we become progressively more sensitive to what is basically in harmony with the ethical law, all our religious beliefs, however sincere, will avail us nothing.

Even Jesus, realizing the futility of providing "signs" to verify the truth of his ethical teachings, indicated clearly that it was not his intention to provide such signs:

> Mark 8: 11-12 And the Pharisees came forth and began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And Jesus sighed deeply . . . and saith: Why doth this generation seek after a sign? VERILY I say unto you THERE SHALL NO SIGN BE GIVEN unto this generation. . . .

These are not my words, but those of Jesus himself, solemnly attested and prefaced with the words: "VERILY I say unto you."

Jesus in these words solemnly declares that no "sign," or as we would say, no miracle shall be performed to prove the validity of his teachings. Jesus believed (as I do too) that faith is not faith that cannot thrive unless it be nourished with constant "signs" or supernatural proofs. Let us be grateful that however much the copyists of the so-called "gospels" may have altered and sometimes mangled the words of the text they transcribed, they apparently venerated Jesus sufficiently to preserve some of his words intact.

One thing is sure: we should pay heed to Jesus' recorded testimony and accredit it more highly than the testimony of those who came after and attempted to interpret his message according to their lights. For if those who profess to be Christians refuse to believe Jesus' own testimony, they can hardly continue to consider themselves—in all honesty—Christians, despite their belief in what are today regarded as "Christian" doctrines.

At once to give the reader still other instances where Jesus' own words and testimony clearly run counter to "accepted" or orthodox doctrinal Christian beliefs, let us together examine one or two other passages from the Gospel of Mark:

> Mark 10: 17-18 There came one running and kneeled to him and asked him, GOOD Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me "good?" There is none good, but one; that is God. . . .

Here Jesus clearly declares for all to hear who will take the trouble to listen, that he is NOT God. Let us but test what nonsense Jesus' reply would present if we assumed that Jesus was indeed God, or one of the three "Persons" which presumably comprise the Christian Godhead. His answer would read: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good, but one; that is, me." No one, upon a moment's reflection, could fail to catch the full significance of Jesus' reply to the man who accosted him as "Good" Master. He knew he was not God and he did not pretend to set himself up as God, nor did he pretend even to possess the attribute of pure goodness which all reverent persons associate with God.

In yet another Marcan passage, Jesus tells us by necessary and logical implication, and in his own words, that his death was NOT part of a pre-conceived plan of atonement. Dying on the cross, he is reported to have cried out:

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me . . . ?

This is the cry of a man whose expectation has been disappointed, not the words of a Divine Person fulfilling a pre-arranged PLAN, whereby his death would "atone" for the sin of the world. His thrice repeated and agonized prayers at Gethsemane also indicate his unawareness of this divine plan, if further evidence were needed. The anguished cry from the cross would dovetail as well with Peter's denial, for Peter was apparently no more convinced of Jesus' divine power than Jesus was possessed of it.

Though Peter may have believed (see Luke 9: 20)—as Jesus too apparently believed, or at least gave his disciples to understand by his silence in this same passage—that he (Jesus) was the Messiah, Peter was not assured in his mind that this Messianic office gave Jesus divine power, as he would have been assured twenty times over had he indeed witnessed the miracles recorded in the gospels.

There can be little doubt that if Peter had actually witnessed the wonders related in the gospels, he would have been thoroughly convinced of Jesus' divine power and divine nature, just as any of us would have been, had we witnessed them; but he was not so convinced and therefore we must perforce conclude that he did not in fact witness these purported miracles.

> In Matthew 10: 33, it is recorded that Jesus said: Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father, which is in Heaven. . . .

God's Word—if it be God's Word—tells us of Peter's denial, and to make our assurance of the fact doubly sure, and in order that there can be no misunderstanding the event, his denial is thrice repeated. Jesus, in the verses just quoted, informs us by necessary implication that he will deny Peter before God. Yet in another place, Peter is hailed by Jesus as the "rock" upon which he (Jesus) intends to build his "Church":

> Matthew 16: 18-19 Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church . . . and I will give unto thee the KEYS of the Kingdom of Heaven. . . .

Could Jesus have been so mistaken in a man if Jesus had actually been possessed of Divine insight? We conceive of a "rock" figuratively as an object that stands unshaken, steadfast and firm, though assailed by storm, stress, tempest, or whelming wave. We have but to re-read the denial episode to realize that Peter possessed no quality that would suit the rock analogy.

The important fact remains that Jesus, according to "God's" Word, solemnly declared that he would deny any man—including, therefore, Peter—before God, if such man denied him before men. This again is Jesus' OWN TESTIMONY, and should not be lightly dismissed or thrust aside if we insist on his Divine nature. We might well ask whether it is within the realm of probability that Jesus would have entrusted the very keys of Heaven (as is claimed by some) to such a one as Peter, were it indeed within his power to do so?

Perhaps (as some Bible scholars have suggested, or suspected) the entire passage wherein Jesus addresses Peter as the "rock" is an interpolation or addition of a later time to establish Scriptural and Divine support for the claim made by the early Church at Rome, that its authority derived from Jesus through Peter. Of course, if such interpolations or additions as the one suggested are at all possible in what purports to be God's authentic Word, we can no longer know for certain whether ANY passage we read in the Bible is God's Word or the "unauthorized" word of some interpolater or scribe who took it upon himself to add something to God's Word. And this is more often true than is generally known, as we shall set forth in later chapters.

Another bit of testimony, supplied again by Jesus himself, which would seem to establish—much as the passage Mark 8: 11-12 (where he solemnly declared NO "SIGN" would be given) likewise seems to establish—that not only did Jesus not intend to provide any sign or perform any miracle, but that he clearly realized that such miracles or signs would not bring conviction. This conclusion cannot be escaped if we read his parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, wherein Jesus quotes Abraham as saying:

> Luke 16: 31 If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded (=convinced) though one rose from the dead. . . .

Realizing that even such a tremendous miracle as resurrection would not bring conviction and that "faith" must be based on something MORE SUBSTANTIAL than "signs," is it at all probable that Jesus would nevertheless have performed the miracle of resurrection against his better judgment? He realized that if a person's faith must depend on miracles or signs, it is a poor thing indeed, and we most wholeheartedly concur.

Can we suppose that after solemnly declaring that he would give NO sign, that he would proceed to provide sign after miraculous sign, giving the lie to his own words? Or that, realizing the futility of "persuasion" by the use of miracles, he would nevertheless use them, to indicate he did not trust his own judgment?

Returning to Peter, we may cite yet another miracle which he witnessed (and according to one gospel version, actually performed himself), which would surely have been enough again to transform any man's faith into certainty.

> Mark 6: 47-51 The ship was in the midst of the sea and Jesus alone on the land. . . . About the fourth watch of the night, Jesus cometh unto the disciples walking upon the sea . . . and they were sore amazed. . . .

In the Gospel of Matthew the same story is repeated with a further addition:

> Matthew 14: 28-31 And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous he was afraid; and beginning to sink, cried . . . Save me! And Jesus stretched forth his hand and said, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt . . . ?

Here it is recorded that Peter himself walked on the water until "doubt" (or fear) caused him to sink.

Walking on water is a miraculous feat and it should be no cause for surprise that I could conceive of no natural explanation that was rationally acceptable to account for the episode related. There could hardly be any mistaken impression on the part of onlookers, or heated imaginations that could read into the episode something that was not there. Walking on water is an uncomplicated act, a simple fact that lends itself to no coincidence (for example such as the sudden subsidence of wind or waves might) nor would the act lend itself to any mere error of opinion (as the opinion that Jairus' daughter had died, whereas she might only have been asleep, as Jesus himself declared).

Frankly, for years I was completely at a loss to account for this miracle until I discovered a similar tale written hundreds of years BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN ERA. The story (whether it be a myth or the chronicle of a true event, let the reader judge) occurs in a Buddhist parable, written centuries before the gospels. The translation is by Burlingame in his "Buddhist Parables" and reads in part as follows:

> A Disciple (of Buddha) . . . set out for Jetavana monastery and reached the bank of the river Aciravati. . . . Not seeing a boat, he had recourse to the Practice of Meditation, concentrated his thoughts on the Buddha, attained the Ecstasy of Joy and descended into the river. His feet did not sink in the water. He walked along as though walking on land until he came to midstream. Then he saw waves (just as Peter saw the wind boisterous). Then the concentration of his thoughts on the Buddha became weak, and his feet began to sink. But he concentrated his thoughts anew on the Buddha, walked on the surface of the water as before, entered Jetavana monastery, bowed to the Teacher . . .

> who later said: You are not the only one who has obtained support by meditating on the Merits of the Buddha. . . .

The author of the gospel tells us "Peter saw the wind boisterous." It seems almost unnecessary to remark what we all are aware of, namely that we cannot "see" the wind, but its presence on any body of water would betray itself in waves, so that in consequence we are made aware too that the identical reason is cited by both the gospel-writer and the writer of the more ancient Buddhist parable as the occasion for "fear" on the part of the "disciple." Both stories tell of the same miracle and the fact that the reason cited for the disciple's fear is the same in both cases also seems significant, and may corroborate my sincere suspicion that the gospel story was not based on an actual event, but was copied or borrowed from the earlier Buddhist tale, or some oral tradition thereof still current after Jesus' death.

Mark tells us that only Jesus walked on the water. The author of Matthew, writing many years after Mark, adds the incident of Peter also walking on the water. Yet the author of Matthew, it is now generally conceded by even orthodox Christian Bible scholars—at least by scholars not bound by authority or vow—largely used Mark as the source of the information he supplies in his later gospel. Then where, we might be justly curious to know, did the author of Matthew learn of this additional incident, or was he merely "enlarging" on his source, as ancient copyists and scribes were much inclined to do?

This proneness to "enlargement" may account for many passages and verses in what we Christians call the New Testament, which many of us nevertheless accept as God's Word in every part. It would seem to me to be a practice fraught with peril to accept such casual additions to the text as the authentic Word of God.

The story of Jesus' and Peter's walking on the water appears to have been borrowed or adapted from the ancient Buddhist tale referred to above by some early and over-zealous Christian writer. The practice of borrowing from older sources seems to have been a common one amongst Biblical authors, as we shall attempt to demonstrate more largely in a later chapter. Of course, if it can be established that these authors were not reporting actual events, or "revelations" from some supernatural source, the doctrine of the Divine Authorship of the Bible would be seriously undermined, if not repudiated.

In the particular instance under notice, even if the events related by Mark and Matthew (Jesus and Peter walking on the water) were true (that is, if we admit they actually happened), Jesus' "divinity" could hardly be established by a miracle of faith such as other merely

HUMAN beings like Buddhist disciples were capable of performing. It would merely demonstrate that Jesus' power or faith was as great as that of the several Buddhist adherents who performed the feat too. The Teacher in the Buddhist parable clearly indicates that there were "several" when he says "you are not the only one who has obtained support by meditating on the Merits of Buddha." And let it be noted that these Buddhists were not believers in the Christian dispensation or Christian doctrine.

If it be admitted that the Buddhist parable and the gospel passage are both based on fact—and in fairness we cannot deny it of the one without denying it of the other, especially in consideration of the fact that the Buddhist account was written many centuries before the gospel account—then it will be seen that the active principle in both instances was "faith," and not belief either in the tenets of Christianity or in the teachings of Buddhism.

Such a conclusion is far-reaching, for we begin to see that the important or essential ingredient in religious faith is not sectarian or doctrinal beliefs, but elements divorced from either. Hence the widespread assumption that sound religious faith must be rooted in Christian soil would be forever repudiated.

We would have to conclude that moral goodness, nobility, and faith are not identifiable with belief in any one scheme of salvation, such as the Christian, or any other, but are attainable by a man of any established religious persuasion, or even by a man who links himself with none of the several so-called "world" religions, or the numerous subdivisions or sects thereof. In fact, the divergent doctrinal teachings of these world religions must for the most part be wrong, because they frequently contradict each other. Even the denominational sects within each established world religion (within Christianity, for example) teach divergent and contradictory doctrines which, if logic and reason have any validity, cannot ALL be true.

Of course each world religion (and each sect within each world religion) claims for itself, with what to me seems a naive arrogance, possession of the unique truth about God and religion, and each sect flourishes one text or another—derived from purportedly "sacred" Scriptures—to "prove" its claim. Fortunately for each of the sectarian claimants, these scriptures are so far removed from the present and so shrouded by the mists of antiquity, or are so ambiguous, that they can neither be adequately verified nor easily refuted.

The conclusion is forced upon us that, in all probability, all of the historic world religions, and all of the theological systems elaborated by men (or evolved in the tide of historic time), including the Christian, are wrong and absurd in their specific dogmas and doctrinal claims, but all have a common denominator or core of essential "rightness" or truth insofar, and only insofar, firstly, as they recognize an "intelligent" (for want of a better word) power greater than Man in the cosmos; and secondly, as they promote broad tolerance and good will amongst men. I might add that we Christians, whilst we may idolize tolerance in the abstract, have failed enormously in its achievement in practice.

We Christians too often dismiss offhand, brush aside, or ridicule the claims made by members of our sister world religions that their "Korans" and other Sacred Scriptures are the supernaturally revealed Word of God, yet we take no time to investigate for ourselves whether the Bible we venerate as His Word is, in actuality, His Word. If it is His Word, we want to make sure of it; if it is not, it is equally important that we know that too. For all we know, we may be doing God a deep and an irreverent injustice to associate His name with the book we call the Bible.

But let us return to Peter's "denial." According to the Bible record, Peter not only witnessed the miracles already mentioned in this chapter, but also saw—almost daily, it would appear—the blind restored to sight, the dumb given the power of speech, and lunatics cured of their demoniac "possession." Jesus, according to God's testimony (again, if we accept the Bible as His Word) frequently conversed with the unclean "spirits" or devils which the writers of the gospels believed caused blindness, dumbness and lunacy. We know now that these infirmities are not caused by devils or demons or such-like spirits, but the writers of the gospels lived in a medically unenlightened age, when the belief was commonly received that devils or evil spirits were to blame.

But when we say that "the writers" of the gospels were guilty of this error, are we not denying God's authorship? Yet we must deny it unless we are to assume God's ignorance of the true cause of these infirmities. On the other hand, if we say that those whom He inspired to write—because of their human limitations—could be mistaken about one set of facts, then it follows that they could be mistaken about other "facts" recorded in the Bible. This leaves us no sure ground, no yardstick to separate what is God's authentic Word from the ignorant guesses or maunderings of unenlightened and fallible men.

That Jesus believed in "devils" as the cause of infirmities is amply exemplified throughout the gospels, but I will quote only a few typical passages:

> Luke 11: 14 And Jesus was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass when the devil was gone out the dumb spake; and the people "wondered" (that is, the people were amazed or struck with wonder).

> Matthew 17: 14-21 (where we are told of a stubborn type of devil that apparently required prayer and fasting to dispose of) There came to him a man . . . saying, Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatic and sore vexed . . . I brought him to thy disciples and they could not cure him. . . . Then Jesus said . . . Bring him hither . . . And Jesus rebuked the devil and the devil departed out of him; and the child was cured that very hour. . . . Then came the disciples to Jesus . . . and said why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said . . . because of your unbelief . . . howbeit THIS KIND goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. . . .

In other words exorcism of devils required FAITH, although apparently Jesus thought some kinds of devils could somehow withstand faith, unless faith was duly reinforced by prayer and fasting.

> Matthew 8: 28-32 There met Jesus two possessed with devils . . . and behold the devils cried out . . . what have we to do with thee . . . art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them a herd of many swine. . . . So the devils besought Jesus saying, if thou cast us out permit us to go away into the herd of swine. And Jesus said: Go, and they went into the herd, and behold, the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea and perished in the water. . . .

That Jesus in the last citation should have given the devils "carte blanche" or permission to go into the herd of swine, thus bringing about the gratuitous destruction of some herdsman's property may revolt the reader's moral sense and militate against his sense of fairness. Jesus' morally questionable action, here noted, actually made the Gadarenes anxious:

> Mark 5: 17 And they (the Gadarenes) began to beg him to depart out of their country. . . .

Who could blame them for requesting his departure, considering Jesus' act of apparent ill-will towards them? But I have quoted the passage relating to the Gadarene swine at this point, not to judge the morality of Jesus' act, but merely to substantiate the fact that, according to God's purported Word, Jesus entertained the ignorant or mistaken belief that devils caused human disabilities, and to demonstrate that he cast them out, or pretended to do so, on many occasions. The healings resulting from these exorcisms, we are told, were witnessed by Peter, who in spite of these manifestations of Jesus' power and the other miracles Jesus is said to have performed, still denied him.

In passing, we might point out that according to Jesus' testimony, preserved in the Gospel of Matthew, he was not the only one capable of exorcising devils. It appears that Jesus had been accused of casting out devils with the aid of Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils. Answering this charge, Jesus said:

> Matthew 12: 27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out . . . ?

This clearly implies that their own sons had been busy casting out devils too, and that therefore their sons also would be open to the same charge that they had hurled against him. Again in the Gospel of Luke, there is additional evidence that others besides Jesus and his disciples had the power to "cast out" devils:

> Luke 9: 49-50 John said, Master, we saw one casting out devils . . . and we forbade him, because he followed not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us. . . .

It is important to note here that Jesus did not question the power of others to exorcise, nor did he question the practice of "exorcising" itself. The "fact," amply avouched by God (if we accept the Bible as His Word), that the infirmities of blindness, dumbness, lunacy, etc., were caused by devils who possessed the power of speech in the days of Jesus and his contemporaries, although in our times these infirmities are no longer so caused, cannot be easily accounted for (if at all) unless we accept the natural explanation that the "books" of the Bible were written NOT by God, but by fallible men, ignorant of the true facts about disease, etc.

What a rank insult it would be to God to suppose Him ignorant in this matter! Yet are we not guilty of this outrage (and many another as well, as we shall learn in later chapters) each time we insist that He was the Author of our Bible? And to say that God or one Person of the Triple Godhead we Christians have long stubbornly professed could be guilty of the gratuitous injury to the Gadarene herdsmen whose swine were wantonly destroyed when Jesus permitted the devils to leave the lunatic and invade the swine, is an even greater affront to God. Certainly if we grant that Jesus could foresee Peter's "denial" he must surely have been able to foresee what would happen when the devils entered the swine.

Finally, Jesus (if he were a divine being) should have had the strength of will in the first place not to succumb to the pleas and wheedling persuasion of the "unclean" spirits who had beset the men from the tombs. The passage in Mark which relates the same incident concerning the Gadarene swine, begins as follows:

> Mark 5: 1-2 And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when Jesus was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man (that is, ONE man) with an unclean spirit. . . .

In the Gospel of Matthew we are told:

> Matthew 8: 28 And when Jesus was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes (=Gadarenes) there met him TWO possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs. . . .

I cite these two parallel passages side by side to illustrate to the reader the theory of "enlargement" previously advanced in this chapter. Here ONE man possessed by devils in Mark becomes TWO men so possessed in Matthew. This is a small matter in this instance perhaps, but it again underscores the fact that men were writing the text, and if it was written by men, it was NOT written by God. Lest any one should still doubt that Jesus definitely believed that the infirmities he is said to have healed were caused by devils, we refer him to the following passage:

> Luke 13: 11, 12, and 16 And behold there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together and could in no wise lift (or straighten) herself up. And when Jesus saw her he called and said . . . Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity and he laid hands on her, and immediately she was made straight . . . and Jesus said (to justify his action on the Sabbath) . . . Ought not this woman . . . WHOM SATAN HATH BOUND these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond . . . ?

Here Jesus in his own words directly attributes the woman's crippled condition to the Devil's power.

But let us return to Peter's denial once more. The monstrosity and incredibility of this denial grows upon us as we review the multitudinous instances of miracle which Peter is said to have witnessed. Peter was present at and witness to many "miracles" other than those already mentioned, miracles of such a nature as would have amply convinced the most case-hardened modern skeptic though he were triple-walled in unbelief.

Is it at all credible to believe that Peter would not accept God's own direct testimony regarding Jesus, thundered from heaven at the Transfiguration? Is it credible to believe that Peter would not even trust his own eyes that beheld the raising of the dead by Jesus on several recorded occasions? Is it further believable that he should have doubted the divine power of Jesus after witnessing so many miracles at his hand? Is it possible, think you, that he should have forgotten his own exercise of miraculous power through faith when he walked on the surface of the water himself and himself healed the infirm? Is it not far more credible, in view of his well-authenticated denial, to believe that he did not in fact witness the miracles related?

Permit us now to quote two other passages, wherein Jesus boasts of or displays amazing control over natural forces, to both of which Peter was again a witness:

> Matthew 17: 24-27 When they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute came to PETER and said: Doth not your Master pay tribute? Peter said, yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus saith . . . lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea and cast . . . and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take and give unto them for me and thee. . . .
>
> Mark 4: 36-41 And when they had sent away the multitude they took Jesus in the ship . . . and there arose a great storm and the waves beat into the ship so that it was now full. And Jesus was in the ship asleep . . . and they awoke him and said . . . Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose and rebuked the wind and said unto the sea . . . be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. . . . And they said one to another, what manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Would it not be appropriate for us to ask ourselves what manner of man was this Peter, to deny Jesus after this cloud of miraculous witness? The only reasonable explanation of Peter's action in denying Jesus, it seems to me, as we have suggested before, is that he DID NOT in fact witness the many wonders ascribed to Jesus, otherwise he could not have remained unconvinced of Jesus' power and divinity. One such living demonstration of miraculous power would certainly be sufficient to transform the faith of any modern man—Christian or other—into certainty.

The staring fact is that Peter was not thoroughly convinced, although he was supposed to have witnessed the countless miracles recorded in what purports to be God's Word, and we present-day Christians are asked to attain full "conviction" with the printed report of these miracles. Even devout Christians, who believe firmly in the Incarnation as a fact of history, are sometimes compelled to express doubt of the authenticity of the miracles. Dr. W. K. Lowther Clarke, in his excellent "Concise Bible Commentary," commenting on Matthew 13: 22-23 (which tells of Jesus walking on the water) suggests that

> . . . the story may have arisen as a preacher's illustration. . . .

Dr. Clarke's comment can only be interpreted as implying strong doubt that the miracle referred to actually occurred. And it is needless for us to add that if the story was a preacher's illustration, it was NOT the Word or Revelation of God, relating an historic event.

At this point we might well ask ourselves why was not the entire passage narrating Peter's defection or denial omitted or deleted by the early Christians from their accounts of the life of Jesus? Of a certainty, any prospective convert or proselyte to Christianity might be justifiably amazed and puzzled—if not dismayed—by this chief disciple's lack of conviction, or by his "betrayal" of faith. That most modern and scholarly organ of orthodox Christianity, the monumental "Interpreter's Bible" (volume 7), speaking of Peter's defection, makes the following significant comment:

> The story (of Peter's denial) would never have been told or repeated, or written down by Mark, unless it had been substantially true. . . .

It is highly unlikely for example that the early Church or early Christian apostles would have "invented" a story which was derogatory to its most highly regarded Apostle, Peter. The story, then, must be true, as even scholars dedicated to the orthodox theological view of Jesus are prepared to concede.

This "orthodox" conclusion, even though it agrees substantially with our own opinion, should not, I submit, be accepted without careful examination or corroboration. But we do have such corroboration in the fact that the authors of Mark, Matthew and Luke accepted the story of Peter's denial of Jesus as true, and they were 1900 years closer to the event than we.

In all fairness, however, we must report that far from being written during Jesus' lifetime or shortly thereafter, the earliest Gospel (that of Mark) was not written—according to Bible scholars—until some 35 or 40 years after the death of Jesus. As for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, these were not written until much later, or well over a full half century after Jesus died.

In addition, it is now almost universally acknowledged, by orthodox and independent investigators alike, that the authors of Matthew and Luke probably copied the story of Peter's denial from Mark. Mark apparently—or so scholars tentatively conclude—obtained the story of the denial from Peter himself. Mark, it may be here noted, like Paul, never saw Jesus in person, nor did he ever hear him preach, nor yet was he one of the many original disciples of Jesus. What information he gives us, therefore, he obtained through his acquaintanceship with the disciple Peter or from others.

But can we nevertheless ascertain why the story of the denial was allowed to remain in the record? Perhaps Peter, when he narrated the story of his denial to Mark, either to give the tale dramatic piquancy or to impress Mark with the superhuman power of his beloved Master, or hoping to establish Jesus' divinity by demonstrating that Jesus—unlike those of ordinary human stature—could foresee the future, put the dramatic prediction of Peter's denial in Jesus' mouth, perhaps intending it only as an embellishment of the story (the very words savor strongly of a fairy-story formula):

Before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. . . .
Or it might have been not Peter, but Mark, who sought to tone down or soft-pedal Peter's lack of faith; or Mark who wished to magnify Jesus' apparently divine power in the eyes of those whom the gospellist was addressing. In any case, the fact or impact of Peter's denial is effectively "watered down," or fades in the radiance of Jesus' miraculous foresight and seemingly accurate prediction of a future event.

Displaying this miraculous power on Jesus' part, as the story does, it would be seemingly advantageous to keep the denial in the record. The truth is served too. Peter DID deny Jesus. Mark might have reflected that it mattered little if the story were something embellished or enlarged upon, so long as the embellishment or enlargement might serve to magnify the great Master, so beloved of Peter.

But what right did Mark, or any man, have to tamper with God's authentic Word? In Mark's defense let me hasten to say that the "book" written by Mark was not considered God's Word when Mark wrote it, and was not given Scriptural or Canonical status until much later when it was (in a very real sense) voted into the Bible by early Christian Fathers and early Church Councils. But is it not strange—and startling—how mere humans can VOTE or decide what is God's Word and what is not?

Suppose several early Christian Fathers had decided, or as it were cast their votes the other way, the Gospel of Luke conceivably would not be a part of our Bible; and if we could delve into the matter, we might find that one vote—or one man's ballot—was the actual margin by which the Gospel of Luke did become God's Word. Does it seem a proper procedure to ascertain what is God's Word and what is not by majority vote? Should not we Christians be upbraided if we do not insist on a method more rational than this, and on evidence more pertinent?

Lest anyone should doubt the likelihood that such startling procedure as that suggested above was in fact actually followed, let me briefly explain that in point of historical fact, which the reader can easily verify in the history books, it was decided by actual balloting at the Council of Nicea, in 325 A.D.—and virtually BY ONE MAN'S VOTE —that Jesus and God were ONE AND THE SAME (God consisting of two or more mysterious "persons" whose substance was however, somehow, "one"). This was the so-called Athanasian view of Jesus as contrasted with the opposite "Arian" view, which regarded Jesus as a mortal human being.

At the start of the voting the bishops who were invited to attend the Council at Nicea were about evenly divided in opinion as to whether Jesus was a man or God. Many days of fruitless debate followed the first indecisive balloting. In the end, as it turned out, one man's vote or one man's voice decided the final issue, because the Emperor Constantine, although incapable of understanding the thin subtleties or merits of the theological argument, became impatient with the bishops' ceaseless talk, talk, talk and the inconclusive arguing pro and con, and intervened, DEMANDING that the Athanasian view be forthwith adopted.

It is reported that a bishop who had the Emperor's ear favored this view. Be that as it may, few dared to cross swords with the Emperor (only two, as a matter of fact, braved his wrath, and voted contrary to his wish), and on the very next ballot Jesus BECAME God by acclamation.

Should an issue of such magnitude, think you, be decided in the atmosphere of a political Convention Hall, with strong outside pressure being exerted in the bargain to stifle the spirit of free inquiry? Should they have decided that Jesus was God by mere majority vote rather than by competent evidence? We might well question whether any fact can be established by majority vote under any circumstances whatever, however large the numerical majority registered.

For the sake of clarification let us for the moment grant that Jesus did have the power to foresee the future, and that he actually foresaw and predicted Peter's denial. How can we square this assumption of his power of foresight with his thrice-repeated prayers at Gethsemane (Matthew 26: 36ff) where he earnestly pleaded with God that he might be spared the disgrace and agonies of probable seizure and execution? Could he not foresee that these events would indeed take place? Apparently he COULD NOT in fact foresee these events, or (by equal logic) ANY future event, and the story of Jesus' clairvoyant prediction of Peter's denial is false.

Had he been able to foresee the future before it had unrolled, Jesus would have known that his crucifixion must occur, and it would therefore have been quite absurd for him to pray at Gethsemane to prevent the occurrence of an event that he knew for a certainty would occur in any case, unless of course he was dissembling. But he must be a rash man indeed who would stand forth and accuse Jesus of deliberate dissimulation.

While the prayers at Gethsemane may be considered of more than adequate sufficiency as evidence to demonstrate that Jesus could not foresee the future, another bit of strong corroborative evidence occurs when, on the cross of execution, he cried out:

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me . . . ?

If Jesus had had the power to foresee the future, he would have known that his death on the cross had to happen in the due course of events, especially—as many or possibly most Christians profess to believe—especially if his death were part of a PLAN of redemption agreed upon by the Trinity in their common counsels, and forasmuch as Jesus was presumably an integral part of that Trinity.

From all appearances, Jesus was NOT aware that this event would of necessity occur, NOR apparently was he aware that it was destined to occur as part of a plan of atonement. His words on the cross are the words of a man whose expectation has been disappointed, not the words of a Divine Person who knew what to expect all along and who had willingly reached a decision to die as an act of atonement. My own opinion is that his strong sense of mission had led Jesus to believe that he was to be revealed (as we say) at the eleventh hour, as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, the one chosen of God who was to usher in a "Kingdom of Heaven" on earth. Which of us has not, at odd moments, had a similar sense of mission, the feeling that the task we have undertaken is somehow divinely appointed?

If this sense of mission is a delusion, it is not in any sense an abnormal delusion, or in any way psychotic. It is the ordinary, kersey type of delusion, whose other name is self-deception (or plain ignorance of the fact that what we most potently believe is not consonant with reality). When such self-deception is attended not by illusions of grandeur, but by humility and sincere dedication to the service of our fellows such as Jesus' was, it certainly can do no real harm of itself to others and may, on the contrary, do much to make the world a happier place to live in, even when the delusion is based on erroneous premises.

How important it is to understand the true nature of Jesus' self-deception can best be demonstrated by quoting a few lines from a book entitled "Life of Christ" by one of the most eminent Churchmen of our day, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, where failure to take the possibility of self-deception into account leads Bishop Sheen to reach some rather startling conclusions about Jesus. He writes:

> Jesus does not fit, as the other world teachers do, into the established category of a good man. Good men do not lie. But if Jesus was not all that he said he was, namely the Son of the Living God, the Word of God in the flesh, then he was not "just a good man": then he was A KNAVE, A LIAR, A CHARLATAN, and the greatest DECEIVER that ever lived (the caps are mine but the words are his). . . .

According to Bishop Sheen, then, we must accept one of two alternatives: either (1) Jesus was the worst knave and most villainous man who ever lived; or (2) he was the Son of God. He would be the worst liar and knave because, according to Bishop Sheen's theory, he would be guilty of practising by far the worst possible kind of deception upon his fellow-men.

Is it not because Christians feel so strongly about such matters that in their desire to establish each his own particular thesis about Jesus, that they sometimes unwittingly do violence to logic and reason? In his book Bishop Sheen wishes to establish that Jesus MUST be the Son of God, because the other alternative to accepting this is incredibly ridiculous. But would not every-day experience suggest to us that there may be a third alternative and possibly even a fourth besides the two alternatives the eminent Bishop proposes?

For example, is it not now a matter of every-day knowledge and psychology that more often than practising deception on others, a man may be guilty of deceiving himself? Would not even Bishop Sheen freely admit such a possibility? Can we not conceive, as suggested above, that because of his strong sense of mission, Jesus sincerely —although mistakenly—believed that "he" was to assume the role of the long looked-for Jewish Messiah, and that in this capacity he would usher in the Kingdom of God?

To support our suggestion of Jesus' self-deception, we are prepared to adduce evidence of the most certain kind, to the effect that he did expect the Kingdom of God to be established on earth WITHIN HIS OWN GENERATION. I might say further that if we could demonstrate the absolute certainty of nothing else from the pages of the Bible, this much at least we could demonstrate most certainly. For it appears that Jesus was firmly convinced in his own mind that the Kingdom of God was "AT HAND" and that he and those who shared his times would actually witness its physical advent with their own eyes. The evidence for Jesus' beliefs in these matters is clearly undeniable, for it is repeated by several who claim to report his very words, and it is reiterated on several different occasions, and in several different contexts. Jesus is speaking:

> Luke 21: 31-32 Know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand . . . VERILY I say unto you, THIS GENERATION shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. . . .

In the next verse Jesus adds another most solemn assurance that what he had just said can be taken as "gospel" truth, if nothing else can:

> Luke 21: 33 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. . . .

Jesus could have given no more solemn assurance that what he said of the imminence of the Kingdom of God was not to be taken lightly. He here assures his auditors in no uncertain terms that his is no casual remark. Incidentally this same reported saying and solemn assurance of Jesus is repeated IDENTICALLY in Matthew 24: 34-35. In still another place we read:

> Mark 1: 14-15 After John was imprisoned, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is AT HAND. . . .

Jesus, it seems, thought—and taught—that John (the Baptist) was Elijah risen from the grave: and his re-appearance on earth, according to the prophets, was to herald the approach of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

> Matthew 17: 10-13 And his disciples asked him, Why then say the scribes that Elias (Elijah) truly shall come first? And Jesus

> answered, But I say unto you, that Elias IS COME ALREADY, and they knew him not. . . . Then the disciples understood that he spake to them of John the Baptist. . . .
>
> Matthew 11: 11-15 (Jesus is speaking) VERILY I say unto you . . . All the prophets and the law prophesied until John (the Baptist). And if ye will receive it, THIS is Elias, which it was prophesied would come. He that hath ears, let him hear. . . .

The prophets had truly predicted that Elijah would "return" before the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven. Because he thought that John the Baptist was Elijah, Jesus concluded that the Kingdom of Heaven was now surely "at hand."

We have still another solemn assurance regarding the nearness of the Kingdom's establishment, from the lips of Jesus:

> Luke 10: 11 Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this (that is to say, you may be certain of this), that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. . . .

How nigh, Jesus himself testifies in the Gospel of Mark:

> Mark 9: 1 And Jesus said unto them, VERILY I say unto you, that THERE BE SOME THAT STAND HERE, WHICH SHALL NOT TASTE OF DEATH TILL THEY HAVE SEEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD COME. . . .

The imminence of the Kingdom was the burden and argument of Jesus' preaching, and he constantly advised readiness and "watching," and exemplified it in several well-known parables. His exhortation for all to "watch" (i.e., be on the lookout for its coming) is excellently illustrated in Mark 13: 32-37:

> But of that day and hour knoweth no man. . . . Take ye heed, WATCH, for ye know not when the time is . . . as a man taking a long journey . . . commanded the porter to watch. . . . Watch ye therefore for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing (Note this word as a synonym for "morning"), lest he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all, Watch. . . .

This exhortation to watch or be vigilant follows immediately upon his assurance cited above in Mark 13: 30, that "THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS, TILL ALL THESE THINGS BE DONE." And among the things to be "done" or fulfilled, Jesus mentions the following a few verses before:

> Mark 13: 26 And then shall they see the "SON OF MAN" (a title or designation which Jesus used some 80 times in referring to himself in the gospels) coming in the clouds with great power and glory. . . .

In my opinion, there can be no doubt that Jesus sincerely believed that the Kingdom of God was imminent: the time was fulfilled, according to his interpretation of Jewish Scriptural prophecy. Albert Schweitzer, the tallest man of our time, clearly recognized this fact, telling us in his "Indian Thought and Its Development":

> Jesus expected that this natural world would very speedily come to an end and be superseded by a super-natural world. . . .

Furthermore, this Super-natural Kingdom was to come within his own generation—or so Jesus expected—even before many of those to whom he spoke should die. It is important for us to understand that Jesus was completely mistaken about this looked-for event, important because his entire ministry was based upon this sincere conviction that the Kingdom of God was AT HAND, and important too because it clearly demonstrates his "humanity" and gives the lie, along with other evidence, to the Godhead or divinity often claimed on his behalf.

Even to the very last on the Roman cross of execution, Jesus still believed that God would reveal him at the last moment as the Messiah, and proclaim the Kingdom of God on earth. As the hours passed and he weakened, not even then did he realize that he had deceived himself, but displaying the very human frailty of putting the blame elsewhere, Jesus reflected that God had perhaps forsaken him, until, overwhelmed with this thought, the cry of deep despair which we have quoted before was wrung from his lips:

Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me . . . ?

These are not the words of a liar or a charlatan (to borrow the Bishop's words), nor are they the words of one who has deliberately and villainously set about to deceive his fellows, nor yet can they be the words of a Divine being (viz., one "Person" of the three presumed Persons comprising the Trinity that Christians have long believed in as an article of faith). I repeat, Jesus' words on the cross can not be the words of a Divine Being who has come a-purpose to fulfill a PLAN determined upon beforehand to "redeem" man or "atone" for Adam's "Original" sin.

These tortured words are rather the words of a sincere man, albeit mistaken in his expectation of the imminent advent of the Kingdom of God on earth, and mistaken too about his own imminent assumption of the Messianic role. They are the words of one whom we must consider a "good" man, though twenty bishops sitting in solemn synod should deny Jesus this category; a man who, very like you and I, might indeed be mistaken because of self-deception in respect to certain areas of thought or fact, and yet be no way guilty of practising deception or other villainy on his fellows.

How completely Jesus' mind was dominated by the thought that the LAST DAYS were actually near at hand, and the corollary idea that the Kingdom of God was to be established IN HIS OWN GENERATION, is once more clearly demonstrated by a passage which tells of his sending forth "the twelve" to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was indeed AT HAND:

> Matthew 10: 5-6 and Matthew 10:23 These twelve Jesus sent forth and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentile, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of Israel . . . and preach, saying the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. . . . VERILY I say unto you, ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the "SON OF MAN" be come. . . .

In other words, the disciples are told that they shall not have had time to visit all the cities of Israel before he, Jesus, shall have assumed the role of Messiah or the role of the "Son of Man" in the Kingdom of God. The commission Jesus gave to his disciples, as Albert Schweitzer points out in his "Mystery of the Kingdom of God,"

> . . . does not contemplate instruction of a thoroughgoing kind. . . .

Rather it is to partake of the nature of

> . . . a flying proclamation throughout Israel. . . .

The disciples' commission must be performed with haste. In Jesus' mind, the affair cried for headlong haste, so near the END was. The disciples are told not to linger in any town overlong. If their message is not received, they are to shake the very dust of the town off their feet, and move on—fast. Even so, Jesus solemnly warns them, before they have finished their appointed rounds, admonishing the children of Israel of the IMMINENCE of the Kingdom of God, the LAST DAYS shall be upon them and he, in his role of "SON OF MAN," shall have returned "in the clouds."

> Matthew 10:23 When they persecute you in one city, flee ye yet into another, for VERILY I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till I (in my role of SON OF MAN) be come. . . .

That Jesus thought of himself as the coming Messiah, and that in his mind the "Son of Man" of Daniel's prophecy and the "Messiah" were one and the same, is clear from his recorded answer to the high priest:

> Mark 14: 61 Again the high priest asked him, ART thou the Messiah? . . . and Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the SON OF MAN (that is, me) . . . coming in the clouds of heaven. . . .

Another thing is clear from Jesus' commission to the twelve. Apparently the Kingdom of God was to be preached ONLY to the Children of Israel (Matt. 10: 5-6, quoted above). This is no scribal error either, because Jesus plainly declares in another context that his ministry was NOT intended for Gentiles, whom Jesus—in some degree of contempt—likens unto "dogs":

> Mark 7: 25-27 A woman came and fell at his feet. . . . The woman was a Greek . . . and she begged him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children (i.e., of Israel) first be filled: for it is not meet (=fitting) to take the children's bread, and cast it unto DOGS. . . .

The woman continues to humbly beg his help, and indicates that she would be grateful for any "crumbs" that might fall from the "children's table":

> Mark 7: 28 And she said unto him, Yes, Lord; yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. . . .

Jesus, apparently shamed by the woman's humility, finally consents to "heal" her daughter of her "devil," not—be it noted—not out of compassion, but to reward the woman's apt reply and her faith.

The same story is repeated in Matthew, with even greater clarity:

> Matthew 15: 22-28 Behold a woman of Canaan came . . . and cried unto Jesus, saying, Have mercy, thou Son of David: my daughter is vexed with a devil, but Jesus answered her not a word. And his disciples came and said . . . Send her away . . . Then Jesus answered (her) and said, I AM NOT SENT BUT UNTO THE LOST SHEEP OF ISRAEL . . . (the reader will note that these are Jesus' words, not mine). . . . Then she implored him, saying, Lord, help me. But Jesus answered . . . it is not fitting to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. . . .

Now we may hazard a guess where Shakespeare's Shylock got his expression "Christian dogs."

Let us quote Albert Schweitzer again, this time from his "Quest for the Historical Jesus":

> Jesus and his immediate followers were in an enthusiastic state of expectation . . . hourly expecting the coming of the Kingdom and the revelation of Jesus as the "Son of Man". . . .

To illustrate how sharp the disciples' expectation was, we might cite the fact that some of them were already turning their thoughts upon what place they should have in the new Kingdom, and which thrones they should be permitted to sit upon. Mark reports that the sons of Zebedee, James and John, actually broached the matter to Jesus:

> Mark 10: 36 Jesus said, what would ye that I should do for you? They (James and John) said . . . grant unto us that we may sit one on thy right hand and the other on the left hand in thy glory. . . .

It is significant that Jesus does not ridicule their request, but treats the request with complete seriousness. For had he not promised "the twelve" that they should sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel?

> Matthew 19: 28 Jesus said unto them, VERILY I say unto you . . . when (I) the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of my glory (in the regeneration), then ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. . . .

It is interesting to note too how the author of Matthew has rewritten the account of the request made by James and John as he found it in Mark. Most Bible scholars (including those who hold the "orthodox" view) are now firmly convinced that Mark was the earliest gospel, and that much of Mark was copied into the two later or intermediate gospels, namely Matthew and Luke.

Perhaps the author of Matthew felt that if he related that the request came directly from the apostles, as it is related in Mark, it might bring dishonor or reflect discredit upon these disciples in the minds of those whom he addressed. Therefore he proceeded to alter Mark's version of the event, so that NOT THEY, but their mother makes the request on their behalf:

> Matthew 20: 20 Then came to him the MOTHER of Zebedee's children (James and John), kneeling unto him and beseeching him. And Jesus said unto her, What wilt thou? She said . . . grant that these my sons may sit the one on thy right hand and the other on thy left in the Kingdom. . . .

The motivation for the changed version seems clear enough, but such contradictory versions in the gospels (and they are legion, as we shall presently see) point up the fact again and again that the books of the New Testament, like the books of the Old Testament (where contradictory passages are also in plentiful evidence) were NOT books which God inspired, but books that ordinary men composed and wrote without any supernatural aid. Only thus can we account for the contradictions, inconsistencies, confusions and errors we find in these books. Such contradictions, inconsistencies, confusions and errors are definite and conclusive evidence of the Bible's wholly "human" composition.

This seems clear in the instance before us for example, because God would not have inspired one writer to say that James and John made the request (Mark 10: 36) and then inspired another writer to say that it was not James and John who made the request, but their mother (Matthew 20: 20). To say that God inspired both versions would be to imply either (1) that God was ignorant regarding the fact related—which is impossible to conceive—OR (2) that God was guilty of deliberately trying to confuse us, which is again unthinkable. The third alternative which we have suggested, namely that the Bible was written by men without God's supernatural aid, eliminates both the implication of ignorance as well as the implication of duplicity on the part of God.

We might point out that when the Kingdom failed to appear BEFORE the return of the twelve from their flying trip through the cities of Israel, it is Albert Schweitzer's suggestion that

> . . . a new conviction dawned upon Jesus. Instead of the general affliction or tribulation which he had originally thought must precede the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus now thought that he must suffer INDIVIDUALLY in order that the Kingdom might come. . . .

In other words, in this interpretation, which seems altogether reasonable, Jesus did not think of his suffering and death as an act of atonement, nor as a source of forgiveness, but merely as the fulfillment of a necessary "condition precedent" (a phrase that lawyers use) for the coming of the LAST DAYS and the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus had at any rate so impressed his disciples (including PETER) with the idea that their times were the LAST DAYS, and that the Kingdom was imminent, that the evidence of their similar belief is clearly preserved for us:

> Acts 2: 1-20 When the day of Pentecost was come . . . they (the disciples) were all in one place. . . . Suddenly a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind . . . filled the house where they were . . . and there appeared . . . cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them. . . . And they were filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues.

> . . . Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came . . . and were confounded because . . . every man heard them speak in his own language . . . and were all amazed and in doubt (=fear) . . . others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But PETER said . . . these are not drunken but this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the LAST DAYS saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and daughters shall prophesy . . . and I will shew wonders in heaven and signs in the earth beneath. . . .

Christian scholars now believe that verses 6 to 11 in the Second Chapter of Acts quoted above, were "interpolated" or added to the original composition, and interpret the passage as meaning that the "speaking with tongues" which is referred to, signified "ecstatic utterances" which persons in abnormal (or super-normal) emotional states of mind are known to give vent to: but such ecstatic utterances are generally UN-intelligible and INcoherent, and this would not be consistent with the rational conversation in foreign languages such as is pretended in verses 6 to 11.

I mention this merely as another instance of the extreme care we all should exercise in putting the stamp of God's authorship on the "books" of the Bible, considering the fact that additions to His Word (or "interpolations" as they are politely called) are regarded not only as possible, but are considered very probable. We may well wonder whether the original composition may not have been itself at least partially an invention or forgery when later additions thereto are considered "forgeries."

I might add that had the disciples in Acts 2: 1-20 spoken coherently or intelligibly in the foreign languages (other tongues) whose knowledge was purported to have been suddenly and miraculously granted by the "Holy Ghost," the accusation of drunkenness could not have been made in verse 13, but the drunken accusation would on the other hand be quite appropriate to incoherent "ecstatic utterances," so that the fact of interpolation seems to be very probable. This is another clear evidence that the Word of God (if it is such) has been tampered with. It is also another instance where an apparent miracle (the power to speak another language fluently without prior careful study) never in fact happened, but was invented and inserted later on into the original composition.

But regardless of the grave doubts (amounting to virtual certainty) as to the authenticity of verses 6 to 11, the words of Peter regarding the LAST DAYS (Acts 2: 17) are NOT called into question and seem to be accepted by all Bible scholars as an authentic part of the original composition. This supports our conclusion, stated above, that the contagion of Jesus' own belief that their times were the LAST DAYS had reached out and gripped his disciples.

Paul, who is often regarded as the founder of Christianity rather than Jesus, was convinced too that his generation was living in the LAST DAYS and would witness the return of Jesus. In 1 Thessalonians 4: 15, Paul assures the brethren:

> For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord (the shibboleth "thus saith the Lord" of the prophets, subtly signifying that it is not the speaker who speaks, but God) that WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN UNTO THE COMING OF JESUS shall not have any advantage over those which shall have died in the interim. . . .

The word "prevent" in 1611 (when the Bible was translated into English) meant "precede" or "be at an advantage over." The implication is clear that Paul expected that he and some of his living auditors would still be alive when the END came, and when Jesus returned to earth. Paul was giving assurance that even the "Christians" of his generation who died before the great event would not be at any disadvantage because of their having died before Jesus returned. The expectation of the END and Jesus' immediate return was so vivid that those of the Thessalonians who were alive actually feared to die lest their death cause them to miss out on the glory of the impending final days and Jesus' return. Paul tells them:

> 1 Thessalonians 4: 16 The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout . . . and the dead in Christ (i.e., believers who have died) shall rise first: then WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN shall be caught up together with them (the risen dead) IN THE CLOUDS, to meet the Lord in the air. . . .

Paul, banking on Jesus' own reported assurances, definitely expected the END to come while he and some of his contemporaries were still alive. This is the meaning and sense of the above passage.

In passing we might remark that Paul had taken Jesus at his word that he would "come in the clouds" (as we are informed in Mark 14: 62). Jesus had solemnly declared, in answer to the high priest's question: "Art thou the Messiah (or the Christ)?"

> I am: and ye shall see me (the SON OF MAN) sitting on the right hand of power and COMING IN THE CLOUDS of heaven. . . .

Jesus had somehow, in his deep sense of mission, identified himself with the SON OF MAN whom Daniel saw in his prophetic vision (Daniel 7: 13) "coming with the clouds of heaven." Jesus' repeated use of the phrase SON OF MAN as applied to himself seems to confirm this, considering that Jesus used this designation to describe himself some 80 times by actual count in the gospels.

No sense of the ludicrous in Paul's day and age would attach to this lofty use of the clouds of heaven, inasmuch as the clouds which we take now as a matter of course, in his times and in the time of Jesus were regarded as "celestial" in nature, and not just the prosaic bearers of moisture we in our poor enlightenment recognize them to be. How wonderful not to be aware of their true nature and see them as majestic angel-chariots, whereon one could be spirited away to the Ancient of Days!

In some such mood, the poet Wordsworth must have composed the sonnet wherein he exclaims:

> Great God! I'd rather be
> A PAGAN suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn . . .
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.
> —*The World is Too Much With Us*

Perhaps too the Emperor Julian (called Julian the Apostate by the Christian Church) wanted to recapture something of the romance, beauty, and clean vigour of paganism and attempted a pagan revival (after the establishment of Christianity by Constantine and his sons) in revulsion from the hypocritical piety of his professedly Christian uncles, and to be rid once and for all of the ceaseless and often venomous debates between Christian Churchmen over the nature of the Christian Godhead.

The principal point which the above-quoted Thessalonian passages convey is that Paul and the Thessalonians believed that their days were the LAST DAYS indeed, with Jesus' return a matter of almost momentary, hourly or daily expectancy. It is important for us to establish the accuracy of this interpretation of these passages in the first epistle which Paul wrote to the Thessalonians because this epistle is now judged to be the EARLIEST "Christian" document extant, earlier even than any of the gospels and earlier than any of the numerous other New Testament epistles.

Because of the epistle's early composition, it is also important to us inasmuch as it reveals how imminent Paul and the very first Christians considered Jesus' return to be. It was to happen soon, very soon, perhaps even today or tomorrow, and certainly not in some far-off future generation. To offset any possible claim that our interpretation of these passages in 1 Thessalonians is in any way inaccurate, we might point out to the reader that the interpretation we have advanced finds complete substantiation in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, where he says:

> 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-2 We beseech you . . . that ye be not shaken in mind . . . as the day of Christ IS at hand. . . .

Apparently some Thessalonians were quitting work and lolling about idly in anticipation of the END, ceasing their ordinary worldly labors, likely thinking it futile to labor as usual with the END so near. This called for Paul's suggestion, to remedy the situation:

> 2 Thessalonians 3: 10 If any man work not, neither should he eat. . . .

But we can appreciate how the idle brethren of the Thessalonians must have felt, believing that the END was so nigh, and concluding that to labor on under the circumstances would be an act of superfluity. This but confirms their sincere and vivid conviction, conveyed to them no doubt by Paul's teachings and Jesus' own words, that the Kingdom of God was to come, not in some far off generation, but literally, possibly within the hour.

Paul's constant preoccupation with the thought that his days were the LAST DAYS is illustrated again and again in other of his epistles. I cite a few typical passages:

> 1 Cor. 10: 11 They are written for our admonition (or instruction) upon whom THE ENDS OF THE WORLD are come. . . .
>
> Romans 13: 11-12 Now is our salvation nearer . . . THE DAY IS AT HAND. . . .
>
> Philippians 1:6 Being confident . . . that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until THE DAY OF JESUS (i.e., the day when Jesus shall return). . . .
>
> Philippians 4: 5 The Lord is AT HAND. . . .

"The Lord is at hand" is thought to have been a watchword or "password" amongst the earliest Christians.

Perhaps another confirmation of Jesus' conviction that the END was near—if further corroboration is now needed—can be found in his teachings, for example his admonition to "take no thought for the morrow" (Matthew 6: 34). As we have seen, it was hardly good counsel for the Thessalonians. It is certainly not good counsel for us. Let us be brutally frank and say that it is the worst kind of advice. If we would lead an "intelligent" life, we MUST of necessity take thought for the morrow.

As a matter of fact even Jesus himself in his teaching could not help but go contrary to this questionable principle of action, as can be copiously illustrated from the parables attributed to him by the gospellists, of the virgins (Matthew 25: 1-13) and of the watchful steward, etc., in which "forethought" (taking thought against the future) is taught and commended. It is not for me to suggest that possibly these parables may be tainted with the idea that such forethought should be focussed ONLY on the "imminent" coming of the Kingdom, and thus lose their general application to life and future generations.

However, relatively speaking, and because Jesus was convinced that the Kingdom of God was to "happen" within his own generation, he was giving sound advice: take no thought for the morrow—because there will be no morrow . . . or only one in which God will provide for all things. No need to take thought for the next generation because this worldly scheme of things will shortly be replaced by a new heavenly Kingdom on earth; and why, for example, should men marry? No need to rear children for a generation that will NOT BE. This very train of thought may well have been one of the primary factors contributing to the birth of the ridiculous notion that celibacy is helpful if we would serve God.

Certain it is that some of Jesus' other teachings were based on the assumption that the END was imminent and such teachings that would naturally apply to a social order which lived in preparation of the END, and was busied about weaving, as it were, ascension robes, would have no validity for other generations like ours which must face the responsibilities of the morrow, and prepare against its problems. Let us recall Jesus' advice to the "ruler":

> Luke 19: 22 Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all thou hast, and distribute unto the poor. . . .

How many of those who claim the name of "Christian" follow this counsel or teaching of Jesus? Or indeed, how could they conscientiously do so without forgetting their obligations to others and their intimate social responsibilities? We have but to reflect a moment regarding what would happen if all Christians followed this advice of Jesus to realize its inapplicability. Today we must of necessity guide our actions as though the world would go on tomorrow . . . and tomorrow . . . and tomorrow. . . . A teaching like that of Jesus "to sell all thou hast and give unto the poor" could only apply to a generation which had no future and no morrow.

Another teaching of Jesus which Christians DO NOT—and for the matter of that—CAN NOT follow. is that which calls upon us not to resist evil:

> Matthew 5: 39 Resist not evil. . . .

This is a corollary or companion-piece to that dubious ethic which calls upon Christians to literally turn the other cheek, should they be smitten upon one cheek. If this ethic is interpreted metaphorically as a preacher's illustration to patience, etc., that of course is another matter.

E. N. Mozley points out in his most valuable digest of the "Theology of Albert Schweitzer" that Christian ministers NEVER accept the teaching of Jesus "not to resist evil" as far as it applies to the community, and rarely if ever do Christians act upon it as individuals. Did we not for example, as Mozley suggests, individually and as a community resist the evil of Hitlerism—and fight it tooth and nail with our very lives and precious substance—and was not such resistance approved by all Christians (except perhaps for a few extreme pacifists)?

Do we not daily resist other evils and try actively to eliminate them from our communities and nation? We would be poor Christians indeed were we to allow evils to take their course without attempting to arrest them. Yet we must recognize that we deny Jesus' authority when we thus "resist" evil.

Why is it that so-called Christians so flatly refuse to follow this and other "teachings" of Jesus? The reason is not far to seek. We do not follow many of Jesus' precepts and teachings in this and other instances, because frankly, we cannot do so conscientiously, in view of the fact that we no longer believe or expect that the world is coming to an immediate end, as Jesus MISTAKENLY expected and believed. Mozley points out:

> Jesus taught his disciples that the world was coming to an end almost at once. Had THAT PREMISE (my caps) been right, Jesus' ethical advice (i.e., not to resist evil, etc.) would have been right. . . .

Because Jesus' premise that the world was going to end in his own generation was WRONG, his ethical teachings were sometimes wrong, because his teachings were based upon this mistaken premise. Ethics cannot be founded on error and be universally accepted and acted upon. The conscience of humanity—Christian or other—cannot, don't you see, accept and follow ethical precepts laid down even by a Jesus, if and when such ethical teachings are based on erroneous premises.

We simply cannot allow what we conceive of as evil to run roughshod over us or range footloose in the world, unhampered or without some show of resistance, or without extending a restraining hand. Our behavior would of course be different if we were certain—as Jesus was—that the world would literally end in our own generation. Then we might let evils blossom and run their course, for then it would hardly matter. These evils would be automatically eliminated "tomorrow" anyway. Why, prithee, should we waste any effort to squelch something that will be squelched in a few days without our stir?

In the foregoing paragraphs it was our wish only to show that a man may believe something implicitly and sincerely, and yet be wrong. Many familiar examples could be cited here, but we will let one suffice. For centuries before Columbus' voyage of discovery (which we may say "proved" even to the skeptical that the world we inhabit is a sphere), many individuals honestly believed that the earth was flat. The fact that their belief regarding the flatness of the earth was not consonant with reality or did not correspond with the truth, could not impugn the perfect sincerity of these persons. So let it be with Jesus.

What he believed regarding himself and regarding the advent of the Kingdom of God, he believed with complete honesty and with sincere conviction. What Jesus taught otherwise may have been sometimes or somewhat tainted by his mistaken or delusive notions, but his place as one of the world's greatest religious teachers can never be denied. The earnest way of life Jesus taught, or more accurately is represented to have taught—and practised—has served as inspiration to many generations of men since he lived, and will serve to inspire unborn millions hereafter to despairing emulation.

His spirit of good will and magnanimity certainly can not be regarded as the cause of the savage and sadistic religious persecutions and the revolting barbarisms practised ostensibly in his name, nor can it be blamed for the "holy" Christian wars recorded in the brief chronicle of man's history since his death, nor can it be assigned as the reason for the totally unchristian intolerance still shown not only to those outside the pale of Christendom but—worse shame to those who claim the name of Christian—amongst those within the pale of Christendom as well.

The corruptions of Christianity—these, and not Jesus' ethical teachings—are to blame. The failure to regard the Bible as a book like any other book and the failure to recognize Jesus as a man like any other man, bringing in their wake doctrinal controversies ad nauseam, and creating schism after schism, resulting in the establishment of countless Christian "sects" based on varying conceptions of Jesus and varying interpretations of the Bible (regarded as God's authentic Word), these failures and not the ethical teachings of Jesus are to blame, these are the villains of the piece that have made the historic record of Christian churches and Christian nations a shameful one, these are the Frankenstein factors that live with us so enormously today.

Jesus was wrong or mistaken about some things, as we have humbly tried to demonstrate, but many of his teachings point, in our opinion, unerringly to the pole-star of religious truth; for example, when he insisted time and again that religion is not a matter of punctilious or blind observance of traditional ritual and ceremony: also, when he taught that religion is expressed, (1) in active appreciation of God and His works, and (2) in the PRACTICE of genuine good will amongst our fellows. I have emphasized "practice" because mere belief in (or lip service to) good will would not fit Jesus' idea of religion.

In Jesus' view, as I see it, good will is all-embracing and covers not only passive or negative tolerance but signifies active endeavor, as we would say, beyond the call of duty. Even though we may realize how far short of this ideal we all may fall, still we recognize its validity and truth. We all—Christians, Jews, and "heathens" alike—owe Jesus an incalculable debt for expressing certain basic ethical and religious principles and truths so beautifully, in parables and other equally memorable sayings.

I mentioned a fourth possible alternative besides "self-deception" which the eminent Bishop Sheen may have overlooked, when he presented his two only alternatives; namely, that perhaps Jesus himself never actually claimed to be the literal Son of God, or the Word made flesh. After all, it now appears that the gospels were written, not by God, but by men without any super-natural help. Such men might very well have invented words and put them into the mouth of Jesus, to support and corroborate their own private ideas about him.

Later chapters will be devoted to demonstrate, by substantial evidence, that at least one of the four gospels (viz., John) was a forgery from beginning to end, and that the other three gospels cannot be regarded as being entirely free of this taint of forgery in some passages, or above suspicion of forgery in still other passages.

One final word on Peter's denial. We will recall that in Mark 14: 54 and in Mark 14: 66-72, after Peter was recognized by one of the maids of the high priest, and after he had denied Jesus for the first time, immediately following this first denial we are told he went out into the porch, and the cock "crew." As we suggested before, the author of Mark must have obtained the story of the denial from Peter's own lips. Therefore, according to his own story, if Peter heard the cock crow the first time, he must surely also have been already reminded of Jesus' prediction of his denial at that point. If, on the other hand, he was too filled with the excitement of the moment to take note of the cock's first crowing, by equal logic he would probably not have been able to recall, later on, that it had occurred at all. It is a practical certainty that no one else but Peter could have reported the story, and if he took mental note of the first crowing of the cock, he would surely have been reminded of his Master's prophecy then, and wept, as it is reported he wept (Mark 14: 72) after the SECOND crowing of the cock. It just does not seem entirely credible that he would not have recalled the "prophecy" at the first crowing of the cock, if he was immediately to recall it on the second crowing.

Perhaps the author of Matthew recognized this difficulty and therefore, when he wrote his gospel, he OMITTED any mention whatsoever of the second crowing, when HE narrated the "denial" episode. In any case there is more in this tale of the double crowing of the cock in Mark's account than we can logically apprehend as realistic, and it smacks more of dramatic invention than of an actual event.

Or perhaps again there may be a germ of truth in the episode: for when Peter assured Jesus he would follow him even unto death (Mark 14: 31), Jesus—being no doubt a man of sturdy common sense—may have remarked something to the effect that while Peter spoke bravely then, before the cock crew (meaning only, be it noted, "before morning," in accordance with the idiom of Jesus' day), he would assuredly sing another tune—not, forsooth, because Jesus FORESAW the event, but merely because he understood human nature from his observation of it in the case of John the Baptist's disciples, or even recalling HIS OWN FLIGHT, on hearing of John's arrest, and later, when told of John's execution:

> Matthew 4: 12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he DEPARTED . . . (a mild way of saying, he FLED).

> Matthew 14: 13 When Jesus heard of John's death, he DEPARTED (or FLED) thence into a desert place apart . . . (that is, into an isolated place, far removed).

Accepting a natural explanation of this so-called prophecy as suggested above would bring the Bible story of Peter's denial within the scope of present-day human nature and experience, without having to call upon anything supernatural (for example, the ability to foresee future events) to explain it.

In the same way we could suggest a natural explanation for the apparent miracle reported in John 2: 1-10, at the wedding reception at Cana. When there was no more wine, Jesus suggested that they fill the waterpots with WATER. And when one of the guests tasted the water, he may have remarked, to hide the hostess' embarrassment, that no drink after all, could compare with good old "Adam's ale," and chided her in fun and good-naturedly, as we might today, because she had kept the "good wine" till last. Not then the niggardly miracle of changing water to wine, but the GREATER miracle of human consideration, kindliness, or gracious tact would be demonstrated by the episode at Cana, and taught by our pastors for our emulation.

Chapter Two: The Ravens That Fed Elijah

In the First book of Kings in the Old Testament, we are soberly informed that Elijah, hiding out from the wrath of King Ahab, was fed by ravens:

> 1 Kings 17: 5-6 He went and dwelt by the brook Cherith . . . And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening. . . .

The language is clear and unmistakable, and if the Bible is indeed God's Word, this event MUST HAVE OCCURRED. To us its occurrence seems highly improbable, living as we do in the apparently more prosaic world of the Twentieth Century, where ravens comport themselves more rationally.

If the event never occurred, and Elijah was NOT fed by ravens, as seems upon the whole more likely, how did the passage come to be written at all? It is extremely improbable that anyone would set about to invent such a tale. In the case of this seeming miracle, it is our good fortune that sufficient evidence remains to enable us to trace the apparent birth of this tale, and to provide for it a completely natural explanation.

But before we can comprehend how the passage, as we know it now, came to have its present reading, we must understand that in the first or earliest Hebrew texts all words were written WITHOUT VOWELS. To make this immediately clear to the English reader, if an English word like "spoon" were written without vowels, it would appear as "SPN."

The astute reader will see at once that the consonant group "SPN" might as readily stand for "spin" or "span" or even "Spain," or a half dozen other words in English. The multiple choice which this simple consonant group provides, will give us the key to what happened in ancient times in the case of the Kings passage quoted above.

For when the Hebrew scribes of a later day first decided to write all the words of the ancient Hebrew texts out in full, in this and other passages—that is to say, when they began to include the vowel symbols in the texts they were copying—they had to puzzle out what each consonant group in the original texts "probably" stood for.

When they were confronted with the consonants "RBM" in the

Kings text, they had a difficult choice. They could expand the consonant group to "orebim" or "arabim." Now the word "orebim" denotes "ravens," whilst the word "arabim" signifies "Arabs." Either mode of interpretation was possible, either was equally adequate to translate the consonant group "RBM."

The reader must realize that the writing in of the vowels occurred many generations or centuries after the original text of Kings was first written, so that it was anybody's guess which word the consonant group "RBM" in the ancient text was intended to indicate, just as a poorly written (or even a well written) stenographic sign may today stand for one word or another with equal plausibility.

Similarly, if our older English writers had used the ancient Hebrew method of composing their works, the vowel-less consonant group "SPN" mentioned above, could be expanded to stand for any of the following words:

(1) SPOON, the kitchen utensil
(2) SPOON, the verb, signifying to be fondly romantic
(3) SPIN, denoting a method of producing thread
(4) SPIN, meaning to turn in a whirling motion
(5) SPAIN, a portion of the European continent
(6) SPAN, the measure of an extended hand, or mayhap, a brace of horses, or other matters
(7) SPUN, the past tense of spin
(8) SUPINE, an adjective used to describe the condition of a person lying on his back
(9) SPINE, the backbone (or, a thorn-like part)

From the wide variety of choice in the simple example given, the reader can readily grasp the fact that the task of the later Hebrew copyists was heaped high with difficulties; they frankly could not know for certain which vowels to employ in any given case or passage. Often enough the context or sense of the passage was helpful, just as in transcribing stenographic notes the surrounding context is often of great assistance too.

But there were no doubt countless times when they were faced with a difficult choice between two or more possible words that would fit equally well into the context and make good sense. It was then up to the scribe to make a judicious choice, and whether the word he finally selected was correct or incorrect (that is to say, whether it was the word originally intended or not), from that time forward the word which the scribe chose would come to be regarded as the authentic one in the particular passage he was copying.

The scribe who inserted the missing vowels in the word group "RBM" in the Kings passage, used the vowels "o," "e" and "i" instead of the vowels "a," "a" and "i," thus CREATING a seeming miracle by interpreting the word "RBM" to mean "ravens" instead of "Arabs," which is what the word would mean, using the other vowels.

Obviously if Arabs or nomads of the desert fed Elijah, there was no miracle involved, but by making it appear that Elijah was kept alive by ravens, the copyist suggested that a miracle had occurred. The passage is amenable to either construction, and as between these two possible interpretations, today it would seem less absurd to suppose that the correct reading should have narrated that Elijah was fed by Arabs rather than ravens.

In the first place, it would have had to be a large-size miracle indeed for ravens to have fed Elijah because these birds are generally wary of man, and avoid approaching him. Again, their food is usually of carrion quality, and they would therefore hardly be expected to bring Elijah morsels that were at all fit for human consumption unless, of course, we assume that they were inspired or instructed by God to do so, contrary to their inbred ravenous habits.

In order to accomplish the miracle, a measure of intelligence and judgment would have had to be miraculously granted to the ravens involved, at least for a brief span, so they could distinguish between their natural food and such food as would be humanly edible. In addition, they would have had to be granted for the nonce some dram of reasoning power, to enable them to understand that Elijah would not do them harm when they approached his retreat to deposit the food.

Should we not ask ourselves why the Hebrew copyists preferred to use what appears to us a preposterous explanation for an event, especially when there was what appears to be a wholly rational explanation within their reach? Could it not be, in those far-off ancient times when the later Hebrew scribes re-copied the Book of Kings, that they chose the more fantastic explanation deliberately to impress and amaze their readers? Probably the more fantastic and full of wonder their tales were, the better they were apt to be received.

We should be the less surprised at this, in view of our knowledge that later on, in the era "A.D.," the utterly bizarre doctrine of Atonement, whereby God was supposedly reconciled to men by reason of their murder of His purported Son, was swallowed with a credulous avidity that defies belief. If His Son's murder was intended to propitiate God, surely this was "propitiation" with a vengeance!

God's anger with man because of Adam's naive disobedience in the Garden of Eden—so the absurd atoning doctrine runs—was not to be appeased until Adam's progeny accomplished ALSO the savage murder of His "only" Son. Fortunately for our sanity, we possess evidence now that seems to indicate that Adam's supposed act of disobedience was merely part of a mythical tale, and therefore never really took place at all. The doctrine of Atonement would in consequence have no firm basis in truth or reality. Any estrangement on God's part from the human race could scarcely be the result of anger aroused by an event that NEVER OCCURRED.

We can go further and say that even if the act of disobedience had in fact occurred, the doctrine of Atonement is morally impossible and morally inconceivable, inasmuch as it puts God in a degrading light, showing Him capable of blaming countless innocent men and women for some "guilty" act of their ancestors, over whose actions they could have had no control and for whose acts they could not justly be held morally accountable.

But to return to Elijah's ravens, there is still another more "orthodox" objection to the use of ravens by God in the supposed miracle. This objection is founded on the fact that "orebim" (or "ravens") were considered religiously unclean. Even orthodox commentators are led wonderingly to remark that it seems hardly likely that God would employ—on such a sacred mission—a bird which He Himself had pronounced "abominable" in His own law (Lev. 11: 13-15), assuming of course it is His Law.

Some reader might of course point out that possibly the reading "orebim" was based on an oral tradition which called for the insertion of the vowels "o," "e" and "i" in the consonant group "RBM," just as theatrical tradition reaching out of the past decrees that Hamlet step on Laertes' fallen rapier and proffer his own rapier to his adversary in the final fencing scene, to effect the exchange of weapons so necessary to the play's denouement.

Still, tradition can be in error. Perhaps it was done this way from the beginning, and then again, perhaps not. But in the case of Elijah, even if authentic scribal tradition decreed that the consonants "RBM" be expanded into the word "orebim" (rather than "arabim") in the Kings' passage, the word "orebim" in Hebrew could also mean, with perfect accuracy, "the inhabitants of the town of Orbo (or Oreb)."

As a matter of fact, a town by this very name was located near Elijah's hiding-place by the brook Cherith.

The Hebrew plural of seraph is seraphim, the plural of cherub is cherubim, and the inhabitants of Oreb (or Orbo) would be "Orebim" (or "Orbim"). In a similar way we might today speak of the residents of Raventown as Raventonians. It seems to me that it would be altogether natural and credible to believe that some "Orebim"—some persons, that is, who lived in the nearby town of Oreb—would take pity on the prophet, starving in his hide-out, and would bring him food out of compassion for a fellow-human in distress.

The narration of an act of humanity, of humane compassion toward a fellow-man is—to my way of thinking—a finer miracle, all things considered, than the highly dubious narration of a man's being fed by wild fowl of the air, whose natural food is carrion, and whose instinct is to avoid man. Since Elijah's hiding place was near the town of Oreb (or Orbo), does it not seem more probable that if the tradition of the scribes required that the consonant group "RBM" be rendered "orebim," that this word should be taken to mean "the inhabitants of Oreb" rather than "ravens?"

As a matter of fact, this very suggestion is supported by St. Jerome, one of that early group of "Christian Fathers" who were responsible for the development of Christianity into a method of religious worship. For, to St. Jerome too, the Hebrew word "orebim" in this passage signified, not "ravens" but the inhabitants of Oreb. What is more, Jerome spent several years in the so-called "holy" land in ancient times and came away with confirmation of this interpretation, having, as it appears, investigated the location and existence of the town in question.

Certainly, if a choice is to be made, either (1) "Arabs," or (2) "the inhabitants of Orbo," or (3) "merchants" (which is another possible expansion of the consonants "RBM"), would be preferable to the doubtful rendition "ravens"—and any one of the three rational translations mentioned above would fit into the context with perfect apropos, and make good sense. On the other hand, the word "ravens" creates an evident absurdity and forces us to predicate divine intervention in the natural working of natural laws. An assumption of such intervention is in no way justified by our own experience nor by the accumulated experience of man since it was possible for him to keep more accurate records of events than was feasible in Biblical times.

When, as in this instance, there are three reasonable alternatives that fit the context with felicity, it would be stretching things to even consider the rendition "ravens" in the Kings' passage, with all the difficulties and absurdities it involves. We indicated above that St. Jerome preferred translating the Hebrew word "Orebim" in this passage to mean specifically "the inhabitants of the town of Orbo (or Oreb)." In corroboration of this, we now quote from the works of Jerome, which were written in Latin, the language of scholars:

> Orbim, accolae villae in finibus Arabum, Eliae dederunt alimenta. . . . (The Orbim, inhabitants of a town within the confines of Arabia, gave food to Elijah. . . .)

To establish that Jerome's choice in the Kings' passage was not a random one, but altogether deliberate, we might adduce the circumstance that in other instances, when he was engaged in translating other portions of the Bible, he chose to translate the very same consonant group ("RBM") quite differently. When he encountered the identical word group "RBM" in 2 Chronicles 21 and in Nehemiah 4: 7, on both occasions he translated it "Arabs."

Add the fact that the ancient version of the Bible in Arabic—with its characteristic "hen scratches"—clearly indicates, by definite markings, that those who fed Elijah were human (e.g., either Arabs or the inhabitants of Oreb), and not ravens, then the evidence against the mistaken scribal rendering "ravens" is at once complete, and it appears to me, overwhelmingly conclusive.

That monumental work of Christian orthodoxy of the late 19th Century, the "Self-Interpreting Bible," timidly asserts (Volume II, p. 750) in its commentary on the ravens' passage in 1 Kings 17: 4-6:

> There was a rock called Oreb (Judges 7: 25) and there may have been a village of the same name. . . .

The more modern "Interpreter's Bible" rejects the suggested reading of "Arabs" as being too prosaic, although frankly conceding that this reading ("Arabs") would be entirely warranted or supported by the old Hebrew text. Perhaps I am wrong, but I do not feel that prosaicness or non-prosaicness should be considered an acceptable or just criterion in Biblical exegetical interpretation, nor therefore a proper test of Divine inspiration, nor yet a yardstick of truth or non-truth. Otherwise, for example, we might be justified in judging the "Arabian Nights" to be emphatically the work of Divine inspiration—even more so than the Bible—for nothing could be less prosaic than the Arabian tales of wonder and fantasy. These fictional stories are easily on a par with the tale of ravens purportedly feeding Elijah.

Finally, we read in 1 Kings 17: 9—which is only three verses after the mention of the ravens—that God has instructed Elijah to move on and go to Zarephath, where God commands a widow to feed Elijah. I merely put the question: why did God have to resort to providing sustenance for Elijah so prosaically, assuming that He had previously arranged for Elijah's feeding with such a bizarre emphasis, by ravens, at the brook Cherith, just a short time before? Had God run out of teachable ravens or was it merely that the word "widow" in Hebrew did not lend itself to be interpreted by the name of some wild bird?

Like the purported miracle of the ravens feeding Elijah, other so-called miracles of the Bible no doubt evolved or were created in many diverse ways. How some were probably conceived or developed, we will conscientiously try to demonstrate in this chapter, and as occasion allows, in the chapters that follow.

It is generally no easy process to find the seedling of any particular miracle, and the taproots of some strike so deep that it would be an extremely arduous, if not an impossible task, to trace these roots to their source or point of origin, even with the help of the many-antennaed radar of reason, but it is hoped that our dissertation on Elijah and the ravens may serve to throw some light on how some miracles may have been born, and may suggest to the reader that quite possibly each of the miracles in the Bible may have had some natural or rational explanation, could we but find it.

But let it be understood that such refutation of miracles is not undertaken in a spirit of "de-bunking," but is motivated rather by a desire to reveal the greater miracles that stand forth when the tawdry miracles are stripped of their tinsel casing. Our method is illustrated by our interpretation, in the final paragraphs of Chapter One, of the events at the wedding which took place at Cana.

As we have seen, the real miracle at Cana was the consideration and kindness shown by the wedding-guest, for how could it possibly happen—without some divine nudge—that one mass of presumably mechanistic matter could consciously feel "consideration" for the embarrassment of another such mass? This is miracle, and miracle enough, had we the trick to see it. Again, the compassion shown to Elijah by strangers is a mightier miracle by far than ever ravens feeding a man could be, for clever magicians or handlers might conceivably train birds to such a feat, but they could hardly teach them genuine compassion.

Another "miracle," of which we have already spoken, was the purported miracle of walking on water. In Chapter One we indicated that the recital of this miracle was probably copied by the gospellists from an older Buddhist parable which narrates an identical miraculous feat, involving a Buddhist disciple. But even if no parallel or source for this miracle could have been discovered or traced in earlier pagan literature, there seems to be some question whether Mark (who first told the story) actually narrated a miracle at all, for it now turns out that the Greek preposition in this passage which is translated by the word "on" or "upon" could be translated, with equal accuracy and propriety, by the word "by." We need hardly point out that if Jesus walked "BY" the sea (or lake), no miracle occurred.

Even the miracle, also referred to in Chapter One, relating that Jesus "rebuked" the wind when it apparently threatened to capsize the disciples' vessel, may be based on a very simple misunderstanding. The words Jesus is reported to have said on this occasion (viz., "Peace! Be still!") may have been addressed, not to the storm, but as an adjuration to the disciples to remain calm. Most dangers that menace us pass in time, and our greatest peril is panic. It seems to me that in such a situation, it would have been characteristic of a man like Jesus to have endeavored to assuage his disciples' unreasoning fear, rather than have spoken bootlessly to the howling air.

One of the most intriguing miracles recounted in the gospels is that which tells of the feeding of "five thousand" with five loaves of bread and two fishes:

> Mark 6: 38-44 Jesus saith unto his disciples, How many loaves have ye? . . . When they knew, they said, Five, and two fishes . . . And Jesus commanded them to make all sit down on the grass . . . And they did all eat and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men. . . .

In re-telling the story, the author of Matthew enlarged somewhat upon Mark's version, by intimating that the multitude which was fed numbered not five thousand, but probably DOUBLE that number:

> Matthew 14: 21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, BESIDE WOMEN AND CHILDREN. . . .

I call the reader's attention to this as another example of the practice of "enlargement" indulged in by those who copied the miraculous tales reported by those who preceded them. Perhaps this process of pious enlargement may explain this miracle of feeding without our seeking further afield because there is a similar story told in the Old Testament, although the number fed was much smaller:

> 2 Kings 4: 42-44 And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought unto the man of God (Elisha) bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people that they eat. And his servitor said, What, shall I set this before an hundred men? Elisha said again, Give to the people that they may eat; for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat and shall leave thereof (i.e., shall have food left over). So he set before them and they did eat and there was food left over and to spare. . . .

It seems at least possible that the gospellists copied the gist of this ancient legendary tale about Elisha's part in the miraculous feeding of a moderate multitude, merely enlarging on the numbers involved, to make the miracle even more impressive, or perhaps to indicate that Jesus' power was greater than the prophet Elisha's. This possibility is strengthened when we realize that in another "gospel" version of the feeding, the number fed was said to be only "about 4,000," rather than "about 5,000."

By the time the author of Matthew wrote his gospel, the number had grown to "about 10,000" (viz., 5000 men PLUS women and children, of whom we may fairly assume Matthew intended there was at least an equal number present). The number fed could thus have grown—a la Falstaff—from an hundred to some hundreds, and on re-telling, to 1,000, and thence, out-doing Falstaff, to 4,000 and 5,000, and as we have seen finally to 10,000, or thereabouts.

> Mark 8: 6-9 And he took the seven loaves (later these seven loaves became "five" and two fishes) and gave thanks . . . so the people did eat and were filled. And they took up of the broken fragments that were left seven baskets (this later became 12 baskets) . . . and they that had eaten were about FOUR THOUSAND. . . .

The supposed miracle may perhaps be explained in other ways. For does it not seem possible that if Jesus' own disciples carried food with them, that others in the multitude also did likewise, much as we might pack a picnic lunch? Is it not conceivable too that some came amply provided, and that they shared their relative amplitude with those who had brought nothing? Perhaps the disciples' example of giving all they had, as Rev. W. K. Lowther Clarke suggests:

> . . . stimulated those in the crowd who were hoarding . . .
>
> —*Concise Bible Commentary*

There seems besides to be some traces of an ancient custom among the Jews, to carry food baskets (which were quite small) on their persons, wherein they might bear with them food prepared according to their own stringent food laws. Such "approved" foods otherwise might be difficult to procure, should they be overtaken by hunger on the way. The mood of picnic in the pleasant hills would suggest a sharing with their neighbors of whatever food they had brought along, and the amount, all told, might well be considerable and account for the baskets of fragments (and possibly litter?) taken up afterwards.

For another thing, one serious "Scriptural" objection to our accepting a supernatural explanation of the event, and our insisting that Jesus multiplied the loaves by divine power, may be found in Jesus' own words, in his outright rejection of the first "temptation" to which the gospels tell us he was subjected by Satan:

> Matthew 4: 3-4 And the tempter (the Devil) came to Jesus and said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread But Jesus answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. . . .

See also Luke 4: 3-4, where Jesus' refusal to use divine power to create bread is repeated.

Just as the story of the miraculous feeding of a multitude may have been copied by the gospellists, and ascribed to Jesus, so the story of someone being raised from the dead may have been copied from a quite similar tale about Elisha in the Old Testament:

> 2 Kings 4: 32-35 And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, laid out upon his bed, Elisha went in and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto God. . . . Elisha put his mouth upon the child's mouth (even then this "modern" method of resuscitation was known) . . . and the flesh of the child waxed warm, and the child opened his eyes. . . .

One of the earliest miracles mentioned in the Bible may, like the ravens of Elijah, have come into existence by virtue of the resemblance of one Hebrew word, viz., "Sinai" (the volcano), to the Hebrew word for "bush," in the episode of Moses and the burning bush. In Hebrew, the word for "bush" is "seneh," and it is altogether conceivable that this word could have been confused, when the story was endlessly retold, with the word "Sinai." Sinai, as we will recall, was reputed to be the fiery volcanic mountain-home of Yahweh, and it would be quite plausible to suppose that Moses detected (or imagined he detected) the voice of God in its deep and throaty rumblings, rather than from within a burning "bush."

The burning or constantly smoking Sinai would constitute a quite natural phenomenon, as contrasted with the supernaturally burning "seneh" or bush. The voice that Moses heard speaking out of the burning bush could be more readily attributed to the thunderous rumbling of the volcano Sinai. Besides, whatever it was that burned, we are told, burned and yet was "not consumed." This would more fitly describe a volcano than a bush. Whether this is a possibly correct exposition of this seeming miracle, I must leave to the reader fairly to judge. To me, all things considered, the explanation is a reasonable one.

The reasonableness of this explanation is further increased for me by the circumstance that Sinai and Horeb are two peaks in the same mountain range, and in the verse immediately preceding the verse which presumably tells of the burning bush (or the burning Sinai), Horeb, the twin peak, is mentioned:

> Exodus 3: 1-2 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro . . . and he led the flock to the back side of the desert and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked and behold, the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed. . . .

And Moses hears the voice of God:

> Exodus 3: 4 God called unto Moses out of the midst of the bush. . . .

The fact that Horeb is mentioned in verse 1, it seems to me, makes it more than ever certain that it is Sinai that is intended in verse 2, and not "seneh" (the bush). Both Horeb and Sinai being, as we have said, in the same mountain range, the fact of their geographical juxtaposition would vastly increase the probability that the writer should mention them together. It makes extremely good sense, too, in the reading of the passage. Let us requote the verses above, substituting Sinai for seneh (=the bush):

> Exodus 3: 1-2 and 4 Moses came to the mountain of God, Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of Sinai; and he looked, and behold, Sinai burned with fire, and Sinai was not consumed . . . (And) God called unto Moses out of the bowels of Sinai. . . .

A further fact may be even more indicative of what the truth of the matter is, and it is this: the names "Horeb" and "Sinai" are frequently used INTERCHANGEABLY in the early books of the Bible.

In short, to some Biblical writers "Horeb" and "Sinai" were but two different names for the SAME volcanic mountain peak.

In Deuteronomy (See Deut. 5: 2 for example), we learn that Oreb (or Horeb) was "the Mount of the Lord" where the Covenant was executed and "the Law" promulgated. But elsewhere in the first books of the Bible (See Exod. 19: 16-18, etc.) SINAI is named as "the Mount of the Lord" whence the Law was delivered, amidst great thunders and lightnings, unto Moses. With the identification of both names as representing one and the same mount, we may now read the passage of the burning "bush" as follows, rendering it freely:

> Moses approached the Mountain of God, Horeb (or Sinai) and . . . God appeared (or seemed to appear) to Moses in the flames belching forth from the secret top of Horeb or of Sinai . . . Moses beheld that Horeb burned with a great fury, and yet was not consumed . . . "God" thunderously called (or seemed to call) unto Moses from deep within the rumbling bowels of the volcanic Horeb. . . .

How far more probable too that Moses imagined he beheld and heard God in the majestic display of flames that burst forth from the cauldron of volcanic fire and in the cavernous chidings of the volcanic mountain, than in a puny bush!

Perhaps the largest group of miracles in the Bible are the plagues that afflicted Egypt prior to the Exodus. If the plagues could be shown to be a series of calamities which might NATURALLY befall the land of Egypt and its inhabitants, then we might conclude that these plagues might not have been inflicted supernaturally, and their miraculous nature would then be open to serious doubt. As a matter of fact, as we shall see, the phenomena reported as "divine" plagues are—each and every one—altogether characteristic of Egypt because of its geographical, typographical, and climatic features.

In addition, the plagues chronicled in the Bible occur and follow each other as they would logically occur and follow one upon the other, assuming the "natural" incidence of the first plague, namely contamination of the waters of the Nile. The welfare of the entire land of ancient Egypt was wholly dependent upon the Nile, and any defilement of her waters would "naturally" bring pestilence and disaster, without the necessity of supernatural intervention.

Even now, pollution of the river is not at all unusual in the summer when the river runs high; and contamination of its waters, we are told, actually gives the river first a green, and then a brownish coloration that would bear some resemblance to blood. In the dramatized Biblical telling of the event, the color was not attributed for example to the red mountain marl that might have been washed into its current, nor to any other similar natural cause, but to actual blood, magically or supernaturally created.

Because lower Egypt depends upon the Nile for its water supply, defilement of its waters would INEVITABLY bring a train of plagues in its wake. First might occur a plethora or plague of frogs—a common enough phenomenon in the Egypt of post-Biblical history, particularly in the month of September, and especially after the river has reached flood stage and overflowed its banks. Then might follow a plague of lice (probably "gnats") that would find it easy to multiply and proliferate at a great rate in the rotting heaps of dead and dying frogs.

With conditions so favorable, the plague of flies that would breed in the uncontrolled decay along the river might, in the natural course of events, bring disease and destruction to cattle and other livestock. It is a matter of record that in the year 1842 a similar pestilence destroyed some 40,000 cattle in Egypt. Again, in 1843, a hailstorm so severe occurred in Egypt that it was said that the day was darkened into night. Hailstorms are in fact of frequent occurrence in Egypt in the month of January, and there is no reason to believe that the plague of hail mentioned in the Bible was anything more than a natural phenomenon too.

With the coming of Spring, Egypt is often beset, to this day, as it no doubt was in Bible times, by swarms of locusts which spell havoc to the barley crop not already lodged by the January hailstorms. This too is a plague natural to the region of Egypt just as the swirling hurricane is quite natural to the latitudes of the West Indies. Many such "natural" plagues, growing one upon another, would serve ideally to prepare the way for a scourge of virulent pestilence amongst the human occupants of any land, a scourge that would spare neither young nor old. In such pestilences too, infants would be particularly vulnerable, and this vulnerability would account for the final "plague" recited in the Bible, which was said to have killed off the young in every Egyptian household.

Doubtless every family in Egypt suffered some loss, and the Hebrew historians labored hard and elaborated upon the facts, to show God's hand in these Egyptian afflictions and losses, to demonstrate their god Yahweh's power over the gods of Egypt, as well as His peculiar favor to the children of Israel. The children of the Hebrew slaves probably missed the worst ravages of the pestilence because they lived, under some degree of segregation, in the land of Goshen, which is located some distance from the Nile. Not understanding (in those times) that disease is often spread by contagion, the Hebrew sacred writers would naturally conceive that their god, and not their relative isolation, had spared or "passed over" their young.

Can anyone doubt that such—more or less—was the process of conception, incubation and birth of the "miracle" of the plagues reported in Exodus? Events in the past are often exaggerated in retrospect, and the plagues recited in the Bible seem to be merely heightened dramatizations of natural phenomena. And because this concatenation of epidemics enabled the Israelites to escape from bondage, for them it became proof of Yahweh's peculiar favor to their nation, and consequently these natural plagues were ever after cast in a supernatural light by their historians.

Later, when we discuss the supposed miracle of Jesus' virgin birth in Chapter Four, we will attempt to refute this particular miracle, using evidence contained in the Scripture itself. In other words, we shall strive to repudiate the validity of the virgin birth by citing testimony given by God Himself—if the reader should happen to still regard the Bible as God's Word—and we will not therefore have need to refer to the far greater miracle of NORMAL birth in that chapter.

Even the "power" or capacity of the amoeba (certainly one of the very simplest forms of living things) to grow and divide into two amoebic individuals, is a miracle of the most tremendous sort, that much amazed me when I first learned of it as a schoolboy—and amazes me still.

I recall that when "life" was studied in the classroom, the instructor listed several characteristics of living creatures, such as (1) their power of locomotion (that is, their ability to move about from place to place; (2) their power of growth (their capacity to take what we call "food" and assimilate such food into chemical building blocks, and thus increase in size, or repair cell damage, etc.); and (3) their power of "reproduction" (their power to duplicate themselves by simple division as in the case of the amoeba, and by more complex methods in the higher animals).

Reproduction! Here was something not only remarkable, but something that bore all the marks of a "natural" miracle. Of course the instructor made no great issue of this power of reproduction: it was just another item in his barren list of "characteristics," and nothing was said of the wonder of it. His academic indifference seemed to convey, or (to coin a word) "contage" itself to the students. The miraculous implications of this characteristic of living things seemed lost in the shuffle.

Today millions still accept the doctrinal belief in the Virgin Birth without perhaps realizing that "normal" birth, that sterile characteristic of the biology classroom, is an even greater, and quite authentic and NATURAL miracle. When we reflect that the life cells of the higher animals (including man) are capable—in some sense—of "remembering" the process of life starting, it may be, many millions of years ago, each fertilized ovum tracing the evolution of the species in the development of the embryo, from a simple amoeba-type entity, to its viable stage, we may well be overwhelmed with wonderment.

How could matter, the atheist's mechanistic matter, "remember" (in a manner of speaking) what to do at each successive stage of embryonic development? Here is a feat of "memory" (or a power of unconscious matter) almost beyond belief, a miracle of memory that spans millions of years. By all odds, normal human birth presents many more authentically miraculous aspects than the pretended "virgin" birth of Jesus, which, in any case—as we shall see—is clearly denied by the Bible itself.

Chapter Three: Ancient Myths in the Bible

When we were investigating the significance of Peter's denial of Jesus, we had occasion to refer to various miracles, including the miracle recounted in Matthew 14: 23-31, where we are told of Jesus and Peter walking on the surface of the water. We also quoted from a Buddhist parable to demonstrate that centuries before the birth or "advent" of Jesus a tale of a quite similar miracle had been recorded and claimed by another religious group for their god and his adherents. The probability is great that the story of this miracle was borrowed by the author of Matthew to impress prospective believers that the "god" they advocated (viz., Jesus) was at least as great as other gods and could perform, and also inspire his adherents to similar miraculous feats of faith.

It has been our endeavor thus far to adduce evidence from the Bible itself to support conclusions we have suggested so that even those who still cling to the belief that the Bible record is the sole and supreme source of divine truth might, without doing violence to this conscientious conviction, accept the conclusions we suggest. Nevertheless, the conclusions reached can ALSO be amply corroborated from sources other than the Bible, like the ancient Buddhist parable referred to above.

To cite another example, it can be readily established that the Biblical account of the Creation related in Genesis was apparently copied from more ancient legends of Creation. In the "Zend-Avesta," which is the Bible or Sacred Writ of the Parsees, and which pre-dates the Bible, we are told that Ormuzd (their name for God) created the world in six successive periods of time (which became "days" in Genesis), AND created it too in the same general order of creation as that recorded in Genesis. In the "Zend-Avesta," first the Heavens (1) are created, then the waters (2), then earth (3), followed by trees and plants (4), animals (5), and lastly, man (6). Let us examine how closely the Genesis version copies this order:

> Genesis 1: 7 And God made the firmament (1), and divided the waters (2) under the firmament from the waters above the firmament. . . .

Let us note here that the MAN who wrote the book of Genesis thought that the sky was solid, and concluded that the gods—the plural gods—would first have to somehow separate the waters which were on the earth from the rain waters "stored" in the Heavens. Certainly had God inspired the writer of Genesis He would have revealed the truth to him that the "sky" was not solid, but "open." But let us go on:

> Genesis 1: 9-10 God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together, unto one place, and let the dry land (3) appear . . . and God called the dry land earth. . . .
>
> Genesis 1: 11 God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herbs yielding seed, the fruit tree (4). . . .
>
> Genesis 1: 24 God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature (5) after his kind, cattle . . . creeping thing, and beast. . . .
>
> Genesis 1: 26 God said let US (the plural) make man (6) in OUR image. . . .

The quotations from Genesis are given to show how closely the order or sequence of creation in the Judeo-Christian Bible corresponds with the order and sequence of creation as related in the "Zend-Avesta," the ancient Bible of the Parsees. But not only is the order of Creation the same, but the entire act of creation in both narrations occupies SIX distinct periods of time.

In addition, in Genesis, the Hebrew God (or gods) Elohim—the Entity long recognized by Christians as their God too—creates the world by simple verbal "fiat," which is to say, the act of creation is achieved by the mere utterance of divine words of command. Elohim speaks the word . . . and the world "is." ("Fiat" is simply a Latin word meaning "let there be," hence its modern meaning, with which all political students are familiar, connoting authoritative or authoritarian sanction.)

Ormuzd (the name given to the "Creator" by the Parsees, and answering to the Hebrews' Elohim or Yahweh) similarly achieves Creation by verbal fiat, Creation following upon the divinely spoken word. This method of creation is at least different from that recorded on the cuneiform tablets on which is inscribed the older Babylonian story of Creation. In this more ancient myth of Creation, Marduk overcomes the god Tiamat and then splits the body of Tiamat into two parts like a shell, using the upper half to provide a ceiling for the firmament and the lower half to create the earth and the "deep."

Even this tale of Tiamat is not without its echo in the Genesis story of Creation, because the Hebrew word "tehom" used in Genesis, meaning the "deep" is recognized by philologists (students of language) as a blood cousin to the word "Tiamat"; that is to say, the Hebrew word was etymologically derived from the Babylonian word.

The fact that the order, sequence or process of creation is so similar in the "Zend-Avesta" and the Bible has sometimes been regarded by hard-pressed Christian exegetes and scholars as mere co-incidence. Consequently they argue that nothing much can, or should be made of, or deduced from the remarkable correspondence of the two stories.

Some, in an attempt to defend their dogmatic position (using the word "dogmatic" in the sense of "derived from dogma") advance the suggestion that the coincidence is "explained" when (as they say) we recognize that the sequence of creation outlined in both the Bible and the "Zend-Avesta" is a sequence which any thoughtful person might "naturally" hit upon if he decided to tell a story of Creation, or how the world came into being.

It is of course highly questionable whether we can accept the thesis or proposition that the sequence related in both tales is the "natural" sequence. What these sincere Christian apologists (or "defenders") and commentators overlook is the fact that even if it were granted for argument's sake that the sequence is, in perfect verity, the natural sequence (there is of course much room for disagreement on this point), even so their argument would fail because the correspondence of the two stories does not end with the "sequence" of creation, but extends as well to the fact that in both narratives it is related that the Creation required six—no more, no less, just SIX—periods of time.

The correspondence extends even further, for the fact that Creation is accomplished "verbally"—by word of mouth—by BOTH the God of Christian adoption, Elohim, and by Ormuzd, and not, for example, by physical activity or "constructive" action on the part of God, as in the Babylonian story of the world's creation involving Marduk and Tiamat.

It would certainly not be essential or "natural" for God either, to have to use just six distinct periods of time to achieve Creation. Could it not conceivably (for example) be done at one sitting? Could not Elohim, Ormuzd or God say "Let there be light," and in the next breath, "Let the firmament be established," and a moment later, "Let the dry land appear," and so on, until all were accomplished within a single hour?

I further believe that it is entirely conceivable that God in His wisdom could in fact create all things at one time; that is to say, simultaneously; having in a manner of speaking "cogitated," or to use Milton's phrase, having "brooded upon" the multitudinous aspects of His proposed Creation beforehand in the depths of the Divine Intelligence, and "measured" and calculated all things needful to keep it in balance, and thus bring the ENTIRE COSMOS into being in a single instant, and realize the poet Tennyson's finely conceived suggestion of

> . . . ONE Divine event, to which the whole Creation moves. . . .

In passing, and while we are on the subject of Creation, we must report to the reader that although our Bibles read "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," they should read: "In the beginning THE GODS (in the plural) created the heavens and the earth" because the original Hebrew version has the plural "Elohim" and not the singular form "El." Our translation in the singular is not accurate, nor is it justified by the Hebrew text. The fact that the author of Genesis did not consider God as a single Being is confirmed a few chapters later when God, after scolding Adam and Eve for their transgression of His will, says:

> Genesis 4: 22 Behold, the man is become AS ONE OF US, to know good and evil. . . .

Again, in the Babel story, for further verification, God is quoted as saying:

> Let "US" go down and . . . confound their language. . . .

The fact that the story of Creation as recorded in Genesis resembles so closely the story of creation in the more ancient "Zend-Avesta" might well cause some reader to ask: Would not this confirm the story of Creation in the Bible rather than throw doubt on its authenticity? Before we can answer this question, we must determine, if we can, whether the story of Creation (including the story of man's "Fall") is historic (=actually happened) or mythical (=never happened).

Because the creation of the world occurred before man was around, and therefore before the art of writing was discovered or invented by man (to enable him to chronicle events and preserve a written record of same) the proposition must be accepted that the only authentic source of information about Creation would of necessity be God. He alone would know how it occurred and how it all came about.

Now it has long been claimed by Christians that the Bible, if not actually written by the Hand of God, was in some miraculous or mystic way inspired by Him; that is to say, they sincerely believe that those who wrote the books of the Bible obtained their information through Divine "revelations." It has been further claimed that the book we call the Bible is, in this respect, unique (=the only one of its kind), and that consequently no other book or writing, not even the Mohammedan Koran or the Zend-Avesta, could lay claim to similar Divine inspiration. It follows then that the Creation story (if based on fact) must have been "revealed" by God to the writer or writers of Genesis.

But if this be true, we are entitled to be curious as to where the persons, who wrote so accurately of the Creation in ancient Babylonia or ancient Persia, obtained their information. If we say that they too were "inspired" or that the truth was super-naturally revealed to them, our Biblical writings lose their "unique" claim to Divine inspiration. Furthermore, if Divine inspiration can in fact be demonstrated for other ancient writings, how can we distinguish which of these ancient records, other than, and often older than the Bible, are divinely inspired and which are not? The answer is, that either we must insist on the Christian doctrine that the Bible is the one AND ONLY product of Divine revelation, or we must admit that Divine inspiration can be claimed equally for any other book or writing, ancient or modern.

Unless Christians are willing to abandon the basic Christian doctrine that the Bible, and the Bible alone, was inspired by God, and alone contains His revelations, we must insist that the more ancient writings referred to above, which tell of the Creation, were NOT so inspired. But then we are faced with the fact that no man could possibly have accurately guessed, without God's revelation, the "process" and order of creation, a process (we must remind ourselves) known only to God. It follows then that any story of creation man may have imagined or built on conjecture would of necessity be mythical (=never happened).

Yet the same story of Creation, or a story too similar to be accidentally hit upon, is found in ancient Babylonian, ancient Persian, and other ancient writings, as is found in Genesis. This can mean but one thing unless we wish to close our eyes to the truth, or deny the validity of logic. It means that the author of Genesis copied the account of Creation from the earlier human accounts, or from oral traditions of these accounts, and did NOT receive his information from a Divine revelation.

The conclusion is forced upon us that the author, or, as we shall presently see, the "authors" of Genesis were not reporting truths or chronicling events revealed to them by God or His agents, whether by way of super-natural communication or through Divine inspiration, but were merely copying down human legends and myths, stories passed down at first by word of mouth, and transmitted later by way of cuneiform inscriptions and other written signs, stories deriving from some ancient poet who attempted to explain the origin of the World and mayhap, the reason for its Sorrows.

The tales were apparently told and retold so many times and over such a stretch of time, that in the course of centuries many of the details and particulars of the original myths underwent a change, something being added or left out along the way by successive copyists and poets, until the different "versions" held their resemblance to one another only in general outline. But their essential similitude is still identifiable.

That the Christian reader may feel a greater confidence in the truth of this conclusion, it might be well to point out that even dedicated "orthodox" Christian scholars are now agreed that the Genesis story of Creation is based on an older myth (=never happened). To verify this statement, I again refer the reader to that most excellent book, entitled "Concise Bible Commentary," by the Rev. W. K. Lowther Clarke. This book, we are told, was the product of 40 years of Biblical research, and while Dr. Clarke steadfastly maintains his belief in the traditional Christian view of the Incarnation as an historic FACT, he is nevertheless conscientious throughout in recording the findings of his 40 years of scholarly study and research, and clearly states in his comments on the first two chapters of Genesis, under the heading (which he himself supplies) "The First Creation story," that the passage concerning Creation is ultimately of Babylonian origin

> . . . as is proved (he declares) by its affinities (=resemblances) to the Babylonian epic of Creation. . . .

The important point, it seems to me, is that if the Creation story is (as he says) "proved" to be of Babylonian origin, IT IS NOT OF DIVINE ORIGIN, which is to say that it was not divinely "revealed" to the author or authors of Genesis.

If, as seems apparent, the Creation story in Genesis, and (as we shall demonstrate later in this chapter) the other Genesis stories of the Garden of Eden, Man's Fall, the Deluge, etc., are of Babylonian, Chaldean or other human origin, then the conclusion is inescapable that the Bible is NOT the revealed Word of God, but is rather a chronicle or symposium of merely ancient human conjecture, ancient human legend, and ancient human wisdom.

Before we examine some of the outside sources for the stories of Eden, Man's Fall, etc., it might be appropriate at this juncture to point out that there are TWO different versions of the Creation even in the Bible itself. This was discovered by Biblical scholars long ago, and to me the significance of this fact is that it offers proof positive that men were writing the book without God's help or inspiration, for if God had written it (directly or by those he inspired), there would have been revealed only one version, and that the true one. It would be preposterous to maintain that BOTH versions were true. The two versions are evidence also that there must have been more than one author engaged in writing the book of Genesis.

The first Creation story comprises the entire First Chapter of Genesis and the first three verses of the Second Chapter. The second Creation story starts at Genesis 2: 4, and concludes at Genesis 2: 22. In one version, man is created LAST, on the sixth day of God's labor:

> Genesis 1: 26 And Elohim (=the gods) said: Let US (the plural again) make man in OUR (still the plural) image. . . .

Monotheism, or belief in ONE God, was a later human development in religious thought. In the second version of Creation, man is NOT created last, and he is formed, NOT in THEIR (the gods') image, but is fashioned from the dust:

> Genesis 2: 7 And the Lord God (=Yahweh Elohim) formed man of the dust of the ground (This mythos of the method of man's creation may be an echo of the passage in the ancient Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, where it is related that the goddess Aruru pinches off clay to create the man Enkidu, that early Caliban of the cuneiform poet). . . .

Throughout the SECOND version of Creation, the Hebrew writer applies the appellation "Yahweh Elohim" to God, whereas the writer of the first version uses only the single word "Elohim" when he speaks of God. Our Bibles translate Elohim into "God" and Yahweh Elohim into "Lord God," so that the difference can immediately be detected, and the reader can easily determine the point at which the one version ends and the other one begins. When the "first" version ceases at Genesis 2: 3, "God" is no longer just "God," but becomes the "Lord God" of the second author.

If there had been three authors, the third author might well have used still different words to designate God, and might have justified or warranted the translation, "Lord Almighty God," and this difference in designation might thus have betrayed a third hand. The dissimilar designations applied to God in the First Chapter and in the Second Chapter (after verse 3) were noticed centuries ago, and this dissimilarity was a source of some puzzlement. It is quite comprehensible when, rather than insisting on God as the Author, we recognize that men wrote the books of the Bible, and each used his own distinctive title to designate God.

Another apparent discrepancy between the two versions of Creation is noted here for the reader's examination:

> Genesis 2: 4 These are the generations of the Heavens and the earth when they were created in THE DAY that the "Lord God" made the heavens and earth. . . .

In the first version we are told that six days were required for Creation, but in the above passage (part of the second version) we are informed only "one day" was required.

One intensely interesting difference is that in the first version God created both man and woman together; but in the second version, first man is created, then later on, woman—from a rib taken from the first man's side!

> Genesis 1:27 (first version) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; MALE AND FEMALE created he them.
>
> Genesis 2: 7 (second version) And the LORD GOD formed man of the dust of the ground . . . (then in Genesis 2: 21-22) And the LORD GOD caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam . . . and he took one of his ribs, and the rib which the LORD GOD had taken from man, made he a woman. . . .

One might well question why God, if he could fashion man out of the dust, could not have created woman the same way, and why it was necessary to use one of Adam's ribs to achieve the creation of a woman.

In any case, why a "rib?" As in the case of Elijah's ravens (discussed in Chapter Two) may there not have been some definite reason why a rib should have been introduced into the story of Creation, rather than some other organ, like a tooth, etc.?

Perhaps if we were to delve deeply into the matter, and with sufficient patience, we just might uncover an explanation that would not only satisfy our natural curiosity in a reasonable way, but one that would corroborate the fact that the Bible was composed, not by God, but strictly by human beings, without His super-natural aid, influence, or inspiration, and that, far from being the product of "revelation," the Bible was a human literary effort in its entirety.

Thanks to the labors of diligent and dedicated archaeologists and scholars, we are in a position to offer a most intriguing explanation which does indeed, in my opinion, account specifically for the mention of the rib in the Biblical version of Creation.

Long ages ago, in a civilization unknown to the history books of my own school days, a civilization by the bye which existed before the heyday of Alexander the Great, and which flourished many many centuries before Genesis was written—and this priority in time is important—a Creation story was current in Sumer, which was written or inscribed on clay tablets, in ancient Sumerian cuneiform characters, a type of "writing" which is now believed to have been one of man's earliest successful attempts at the art of writing, if it is not indeed his earliest.

The story tells of a paradise like unto the Biblical Eden wherein neither sickness nor death, NOR TRAVAIL OF BIRTH was known, and where:

> The lion kills not. . . .
> The wolf preys not on the lamb. . . .

In this paradise, the gods (plural gods like those of Genesis) cause eight plants to sprout and grow, which a "two-faced" god (foreshadowing the serpent) plucks one by one and gives them to Enki, the man, to eat.

Because Enki has dared eat these "divine" plants, the great Mother-Goddess, Ninharsag, pronounces upon him the curse of death, just as it is related in the Bible that Yahweh levelled a similar curse of death at Adam because he ate of the fruit of a certain divinely forbidden tree, Yahweh declaring also that woman thereafter shall suffer travail of birth. In the cuneiform version, much stress is laid on the absence of woman's travail BEFORE Enki's act.

in eight separate organs, and one of these eight ailing organs is the

In the Sumerian tale, Enki becomes ill after the curse, and ails rib. Now this in itself would not be remarkable, although the very fact that it IS mentioned in the ancient Sumerian story of Creation might theoretically account for its mention and use in the later Biblical version of Creation.

Details in a story (like the rib in Genesis) sometimes seem strange unless we are familiar with an earlier version of the story, and such details crop up almost unbidden, like Banquo's ghost, to betray the source from whence some copyist took his information. But as I have said, the mere mention of the rib in the earlier Creation story, in and of itself, would NOT be particularly remarkable and would scarcely be sufficiently compelling to corroborate—in any decisive way—that the later story was in fact copied from the earlier. But there is much more.

In the Sumerian version, in arranging for Enki's recovery to health, one goddess is created specifically to heal Enki's rib, and her name is Nin-ti. Now in the Sumerian language, the word for "rib" is "ti" (pronounced tee). Hence, Nin-ti could be translated "the woman (or lady) of the rib" or simply, "the rib-lady." But there is also another Sumerian word "ti" which means "to give life to" or "to make live." Therefore the goddess "Nin-ti" might as readily mean "the woman (or lady) who makes live" or "the woman who gives life," as well as "the woman of the rib."

The fact that the Sumerian word "ti" has these two possible meanings would again not seem to bear any special significance, because many words in English (and other languages too) can and do have two or more distinct meanings. However, it is significant for us because the woman in the Bible story WHO IS FASHIONED FROM A RIB, is given the Hebrew name "EVE," a name which signifies "the woman who gives life" or "the woman who makes live," and this is precisely the other of the two possible meanings of the Sumerian word Nin-ti, which is also the name of the goddess who came to nurse Enki's ailing rib back to health.

Eve in the Bible story is also "the woman of the rib" by virtue of the method of her creation, as narrated by the author of Genesis. In translating the older story into Hebrew, the Hebrew writer, apparently aware of the two significations of the Sumerian word "ti," gives his "heroine" the name Eve, which renders the word "ti" exactly in its second sense (the woman who gives life), but he also wants to preserve the first sense (the woman of the rib) from the ancient story, and proceeds—quite logically, if you put yourself in his place—to present her also as the woman of the rib, by showing that she was created from a rib. Thus both meanings are preserved from the older Creation story, which he is copying either from memory, or from some document or tablet before him.

The connection of the two Creation stories seems unmistakable. It is far too pat to be mere coincidence. The Hebrew literary scribe (and not—be it noted—NOT God), who wrote the book of Genesis seems clearly to have been familiar with the ancient Sumerian story, and betrays his "plagiarism" when he names his first woman "Eve" (the woman who gives life) and labors to present her ALSO as the rib-woman too. It is as though the Hebrew writer left his thumbprint, the whorls of which could still be read, on the hardened clay of an old Sumerian tablet, and another equally legible print on some early Hebrew scroll.

Besides, it was in the Middle East where the Sumerian civilization flourished; and the Middle East we refer to is "eastward" of ancient Palestine, and this circumstance may well account for the manner in which the Hebrew scribe describes the location of the Biblical garden of Eden:

> Genesis 2: 8 And Yahweh Elohim (the LORD GOD of the second version of Creation in the Bible) planted a garden EASTWARD (that is, eastward of ancient Palestine) in Eden. . . .

This description would correspond with the presumed location of the Sumerian garden of Dilmun, and in writing about this garden, the Hebrew writer would naturally "locate" it, in his mind, in Sumeria, the source of the story he was copying, and would accordingly set it forth as "eastward" in relation to his own geographical situation.

The very fact that there is also a "garden" in the old Sumerian story is another point of affinity between the two stories. And, it is a "paradise" in both stories too, from which pain and violence (the lion kills not, etc.) are absent. As in Eden, so in the Sumerian garden of Dilmun, woman is free of the travail of child-birth UNTIL the "curse" is lodged by the goddess Ninharsag. Again, as in Eden, so in Dilmun, there are plants which it is forbidden man should eat. In both stories too, man is not subject to death until he has violated the divine interdiction against the eating of certain "divine" plants (the plant in the Genesis story is a "tree"). Even the curse of death put upon man by a Divine Being—related in both stories—is another very significant parallel. The further curse affecting women, following upon violation of the divine "taboo," namely that they should henceforth suffer TRAVAIL in child-birth, discloses more evidently than any other point perhaps, the close kinship of the two stories.

Add to these remarkable features of resemblance the strange detail of the "rib," with its multiplicitous ramifications not only of similarity, but of actual coincidence as well and, I submit, we would be hard put to entertain any real doubt that the Bible story must have been derived, ultimately, from the Sumerian tale of the garden of Dilmun.

Returning now to the TWO Creation stories in the Bible itself, the reader, if he is so minded, can discover still other discrepancies between the two Biblical versions. The variations already given above should suffice to demonstrate that there are, in fact, two very distinct versions of Creation in the book of Genesis, a circumstance which once more confirms our thesis that the Bible was neither written nor inspired by God, but instead was composed by men without His assistance.

For had the writer or writers been writing under Divine inspiration, or from revelations supernaturally granted them, there would have been but ONE version of Creation, or if two, both versions would agree and tally. Most assuredly, we cannot suppose that God was confused or ignorant as to how it happened, and yet this is exactly what we do pretend to believe when we insist (in spite of the two discrepant versions) that the Bible is the work of His hand or the result of His revelation. The other alternative, viz., that it was God's deliberate plan to confuse mankind by providing these two differing versions, is—to my mind—unthinkable.

Another myth borrowed or culled by the narrators of Genesis is an ancient Persian legend which relates that an evil demon in the form of a serpent (sent by Ahriman, Prince of the Devils) gave the "first" human pair (the Adam and Eve of the Persian story) some fruit from a wonderful tree—fruit which, in the Persian tale, is said to have imparted immortality rather than knowledge of good and evil, as in Genesis. The Persian story goes on to relate the subsequent "fall" of this first human pair, just as the Biblical Adam and Eve are said to have "fallen" from their pristine innocence. Another story of man's fall, similar to the Sumerian account already mentioned, has been found inscribed on Babylonian clay tablets. The cuneiform writing on these tablets is a later form of cuneiform than the Sumerian, yet like the Sumerian, is a more ancient method of "writing" than that used by the Hebrews.

There is also an ancient Greek story with which many of us are probably familiar, which tells of a tree in the Garden of the Hesperides, a tree which was said to bear the golden apples of immortality. We may recall that it was one of the twelve labors of Hercules to procure these very apples. This tale is another "echo" of the ancient human mythos or legend, which the author of Genesis—or one of the authors—refurbished and revamped, adding some details of his own, and giving the myth a new interpretation. In the Greek myth, however, the serpent GUARDS the tree, and is represented on ancient medallions as twined around the tree's trunk. In Genesis the serpent no longer "guards" the tree, but is given a new role.

In Genesis, possibly for the first time, there are TWO wonderful trees involved in the old story, although this is a fact of which few Christians are aware:

> Genesis 3: 22-24 And the LORD GOD (the second author's designation for God) said, behold the man is become as one of US (the inescapable plural) to know good and evil; and now lest he put forth his hand, and take ALSO of the tree of life, and eat and live forever: therefore the LORD GOD sent him forth from the garden . . . so he drove out the man and placed at the east of the garden of Eden some Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep (or guard) the way of the tree of life. . . .

Apparently it had not been forbidden Adam or his consort to eat of this second tree (viz., the tree of life). See Genesis 2: 16-17, where God commands Adam that he may eat "of EVERY tree of the garden" except only the tree of knowledge. Why then had he and Eve not eaten of this other wondrous tree and attained life everlasting? This other tree seems to be an awkward remnant left over from the older myth, with which the writer of Genesis is apparently familiar, and represents a detail which he feels he must somehow weave into his version. In his new interpretation of the tree story, the tree of knowledge is altogether in the spotlight, but his mind reverts, as the episode of Eden draws to a close, to the older myth where the tree of life was limelighted at stage center. It is as though, occupied all along with his new interpretation of the tree story, he had quite forgotten about the tree of life. Then, as the curtain falls, he forgets himself momentarily, and forgets the new interpretation he has labored to set forth, and mentions it as if by afterthought. But this very "slip" on his part, it seems to me, reveals his thorough acquaintance with the older myth.

In the mythic Greek garden of Hesperides, the golden apples of immortality are guarded by what is described as a serpentine dragon. In Genesis, the second tree (the tree of life) is to be guarded by "Cherubim." Inasmuch as the word "cherub" in the Orient of ancient times (and at the time the Eden story was written) did not signify "angel" as it does now, but meant instead a kind of mythological animal, it turns out that the tree is to be guarded in Eden exactly as in the Greek version, by a "dragon."

Furthermore, this second Biblical tree is to be guarded as well (according to the Genesis passage quoted above) by a "flaming sword which turned every way." This detail too has an exact counterpart, in the old Babylonian myth. In this version the sacred grove of Anu is said to be guarded by "a sword turning to all the four points of the compass." The correspondence is unmistakable, and too entirely similar to be an accidental coincidence.

But to go on to an even more remarkable parallel, we may report that there is an ancient Chinese story of a garden in which grew a wonderful tree too, which again was guarded by a "winged" serpent or dragon. From this Chinese garden flowed four rivers, a "GOLDEN" river, a Red river, the river of the Lamb, etc. Now let us compare the Bible story where it tells of the river in Eden:

> Genesis 2: 10-11 And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted and became FOUR heads (four heads instead of four rivers). The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is GOLD, etc. (the golden river in the Chinese version becomes the Pison tributary compassing a land of gold). . . .

The myth, as we can readily see, is retold in the Bible, but details suggested by the Hebrew author's imagination and geographical location are added to make it more graphic and bring it home to his contemporary audience.

Just so, too, the authors of Genesis repeated—with a difference—the tradition that a serpent was in some way involved in the legend of the wondrous tree, which stood in the midst of the primeval garden. In one account, as we have seen, the serpent "guarded" the tree; in another, the serpent gave the wondrous fruit of the tree to the first human pair; but in the Biblical version, the serpent is represented as persuading the first humans to eat of the forbidden tree's fruit. Each teller of the tale adds something of his own and enlarges on or embellishes the original myth.

In like manner, each teller of the ancient Scandinavian tale of "Amleth" (which contained the first germ of "Hamlet") added to the story until Shakespeare marked it for his very own by his powerful and penetrating interpretation of the story. We are borrowers all. Shakespeare borrowed enormously—and this is not said in a spirit of detraction, but is rather to his credit to have so improved upon his originals as to transform them.

Even the moral teachings we Christians so admire as belonging uniquely to Jesus were for the most part borrowed by him from the books of "the Law and the Prophets"—although to his great credit too, he gave them a new emphasis and a new direction.

Some borrowers of course merely repeat the narration of events or ideas, without adding anything of their own; others try to evaluate the events or ideas they borrow, to point a moral or adorn a tale; still others dramatize the borrowed events and ideas, to delight us or give us pause to ponder; and so on.

Some enterprising individuals actually fabricate or invent events, for example to explain or suggest the origin of some phenomenon in the world. As children, do we not learn with delight how the robin supposedly got his red breast? Even this tale, simple as its purpose is, has many versions, and the world and our lives would be poorer without them.

To return to our Edenic tale, we could go on to cite other ancient sources of this Biblical story, all of which seem always to involve the "fall" of man. For example, when the serpent in the Persian legend gives the fruit of the wondrous tree to the first human pair, we learn that evil inclinations thereupon entered their hearts, and their moral excellence was therewith destroyed. In ancient legend, man is ever represented as enjoying a "Golden Age" of careless happiness, until curiosity or other motive leads him to transgress some god's will, and then all the sorrows and troubles to which mortals are heir, rush into the world.

The tale of Pandora is a good case in point, the better because it is one with which we are more or less familiar. Zeus (the Greeks' Supreme Being) gave Epimetheus (the man in the myth) a woman by the name of Pandora, much as Yahweh (the Hebrews' Supreme Being) gave Adam his Eve. But how we mortals came by our ills is accounted for in diverse ways in the two tales. In the Greek version, curiosity leads the Man to lift the lid of Pandora's box or vase, contrary to Zeus' command, whereupon all manner of ills stream forth into the world, "hope" alone remaining in the vase.

Now if, as seems evident, the Edenic tale was borrowed from more ancient human myths and the story of Adam and Eve was not an historic event supernaturally revealed by God, it follows that the whole orthodox scheme of Christian salvation (based as it is on the supposed historic truth of the tale of Eden and Man's Fall) must be discarded, unless we wish to delude ourselves by accepting a myth as the foundation stone of our religion.

Let us be particularly clear on this point: Christian theology tells us that the Incarnation (of Jesus) had become necessary or was planned, to provide a means to "redeem" the sin brought into the world by man's "fall." But if the "fall" was just a myth, and there was actually no falling away from God on man's part, and no sin to be atoned for, there would be no basis either for the doctrine of Atonement.

Certainly no fair-minded person still believes in the immoral and wicked idea that children should be punished for the misdeeds of their parents. Yet it is inescapable that this is exactly what, by accepting the myth of Man's Fall, we believe of God. We say in effect that because our purported progenitor, Adam, transgressed God's will, God considered Adam's progeny (that is, all mankind) to be tainted with the guilt of this transgression. This is the "sin" with which theologians say we are conceived, the sin that derives from our "origin" and which forms the basis of the doctrine of "Original" Sin.

We have faults enough to answer for, without having those of our forefathers piled upon our backs. In law, the idea of "attainder" (children and kin being "attainted" by and punishable for their father's treasons and other crimes) was rejected long ago as immoral, illegal, and manifestly unjust, but apparently this idea is still with us in our religion, which should instead have led the way in casting such obvious moral injustice aside. Therefore, even if we were unable to demonstrate that the Fall of Man was a myth of the purest water, I submit we should still be prepared to reject the morally degrading notion that God would hold us guilty of and accountable for the misdeed of another.

Our rejection of the story of Adam and Eve would also find justification on still other grounds. For one thing it is contrary to our experience and the experience of mankind over the centuries, inasmuch as snakes and other animals do not have the power of speech, except in fairy tales. For another thing, it is contrary to common sense, as it is highly improbable that snakes EVER HAD this capacity to utter words, or the ability to reason and persuade. Again, it is contrary to the discoveries or "revelations" of science too: there can be little doubt, from the evidence which science has accumulated, that man has slowly "evolved" from a less complex ancestry. Besides, as we have intimated above, it is contrary to our sense of what is ethically right, revolting as we do at the immoral principle of our being "tainted" with sin by another's wrongful deed.

If the doctrine of Atonement had to be abandoned, we would of course be left to our own endeavors, our own merits, and God's infinite love and mercy for "salvation" of any kind. But is this alternative not more in keeping with moral justice? Can we believe that it is better for us to weakly lean upon another to perhaps redeem us from our faults, rather than face up to the fact that it is up to each of us to make use of our own God-given inner resources, and endeavor to effect and work out our own salvation?

But would not the rejection of the doctrine of Man's Fall and the doctrine of Atonement destroy our religion? Definitely not. In my opinion, contrariwise, it saves it. The Christian doctrines of Original Sin and Redemption are not at all essential to the true values of what we call "Christianity."

In fact, if we will trouble ourselves to look into the matter, the man whom Christians are supposed to accept as their spiritual leader (if not their God) nowhere insists that belief in such doctrines is essential to what he calls attainment of the Kingdom of God, or essential to what we more often refer to as "salvation," so that discarding these Christian doctrines of Original Sin and Atonement (based, as we have seen, not on God's revelation but rather on ancient myth and legend) would in no way militate against the conscientious scruples of those who accept the leadership of Jesus.

> No teaching about the atonement is given by Jesus to his disciples; he demands of them no theory about it, no faith in it. . . .
> —*Albert Schweitzer, Epilogue to Mozley's "Theology."*

Surely if the over-riding purpose of Jesus' life had been "atonement" or redemption, he would have made this much clear. Instead he maintains what must be regarded as a strange and unnatural silence upon the subject, if the claims of Christian theology concerning the atoning purpose of his life and death is at all correct. Even in the famous prayer he taught his disciples, known to us as "the Lord's Prayer," he does not teach them to ask forgiveness on the basis of the redemptive power of his death, but tells them to plead to be forgiven "as they forgive those who trespass against them."

Rejection of the doctrines of Original Sin and Atonement may involve rejection likewise of Jesus' divinity, but this Jesus himself, in any case, denies (see Mark 10: 17-18)—as we have already demonstrated in Chapter One. Certainly if we cannot accept and give full credence to Jesus' own words or testimony, we should not accept his spiritual leadership. More often than not our acceptance of his leadership in this respect is based not on doctrinal considerations, but rather on certain excellent moral precepts and counsels, which are attributed to Jesus, but which were not for the most part original with Jesus at all, but were precepts he borrowed from the writers of the Old Testament.

What we should highly admire in Jesus is his skilful emphasis, development and refinement of certain basic Judaic moral precepts some few of which he accepted wholeheartedly; others his conscience or ethical sense declined to accept as valid without modification. He had the courage to challenge and alter many of the older teachings in Judaism, and his modifications of them often strike a deeply responsive chord in us, and accord as beautifully with our own conceptions of morality as they rang true to his. But at the same time we should not look upon him as our sole preceptor, or consider him a man apart, supernaturally unique among men, for there have been many thoughtful religious teachers among men, to whom we are all indebted for our own better understanding today of life, religion, and God.

Jesus fought earnestly for "honest" religion, freed of the dead hand of numbing tradition, and freed of hypocrisy and pretense—and so indeed should we all, if we love God or truth, or even if we hold Jesus in esteem. I believe too that Jesus would agree that we but affront God by pretending to believe that once, long ago, He condemned and cursed all men because one man—supposedly our progenitor—was guilty of a disobedience to His command, not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, purportedly the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is my opinion that God would want his creatures to be able to distinguish between good and evil, and had I none of the reasons outlined in this chapter for rejecting the story of Man's Fall, this consideration, together with the fact that I cannot believe that God would be capable of condemning any man for an act done at another's hand, were alone sufficient to sway me to disbelieve the authenticity of this story, and seriously to question the divine authorship of the Bible.

Jesus was not abjectly afraid to be critical of "the Law" (viz., the established religion of his day) when it grated on his sense of right and wrong. Why then should not WE emulate him today and refuse to accept, in the religious doctrines of our times, what is equally repugnant to our moral sense, and strive (as he did) for a better and clearer understanding of ethics and God? To give the reader an example of how Jesus proceeded in such instances, we might cite how he justified his performance of an act of mercy on the Sabbath, when it was objected that he had violated the traditional law of the Sabbath by so doing. He said:

> Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. . . . .

The Sabbath, because it is a "religious" observance—if indeed it is—

is not, he argued, sacred in and of itself, and should not be observed blindly, without consideration of all factors and circumstances. Today we might develop the idea even further and say that no sabbath is worthy of observance except a sabbath from greed and spite, with their bitter progeny, a sabbath that could be observed without reference to the calendar of days. No day should be singled out as sacred above any other—all days should be equally sacred to God. It might be appropriate to quote here Jesus' famous admonition regarding the practice of tithing, which applies with equal force to observance of the Sabbath:

> Matthew 23: 23 Hypocrites! Ye faithfully tithe mint and anise and cummin (he might have added "and ye faithfully observe the Sabbath"), but ye neglect the more important matters of the moral law. . . .

The more important matters to which Jesus referred include regarding our fellow man with good will, a good will which would inevitably manifest itself in just dealing, mercy, and consideration. Jesus was near the very heart of religion in this pronouncement as in many of his other strictures and counsels. Strict observance of the Sabbath, faithful tithing, performance of prescribed rites, long prayers—all these (he cautions us in effect) do NOT fulfill the moral law, or in themselves constitute "essential" religious practices. These are mere "forms" or rites that any man with an empty heart might perform. Religion, Jesus would have us believe, goes much deeper than outward form or the rites we celebrate in church. Nor is "right" (the basic aim of all religion) synonymous with "rite." Our religious duty or obligation is never satisfied in ritual.

But to return to the subject of our present chapter: the Eden story and the story of Man's Fall are not the only myths borrowed by the authors of Genesis from ancient writings and traditions. Indeed, we can find ancient sources for every important story in the Bible, demonstrating again that far from being the product of Divine revelation, the Bible was written by men, drawing upon fables and myths handed down from generations of man even then long gone from the terrestrial scene, and from civilizations long since forgotten.

Perhaps the most widely known story of the Bible, next to the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, is Noah and the Flood. The Bible relates that some time after the "Fall," God deeply regretted that He had created Man:

> Genesis 6: 6 It repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth. . . . And He said I will destroy man . . . and beast,

> and creeping thing, and the fowls of the air . . for it repenteth me that I have made them. . . .

Why God should destroy the other creatures beside man it is difficult to understand, inasmuch as His wrath was directed not against them, but (as we are told in Genesis 6: 5) against men, because of their "wickedness" and "the evil imaginations of their hearts." Even the fact that God—whose Providence presumably sees before and after—should repent having made man, or anything else, seems strange. Indeed, God—if we accept that He inspired the writer of the book in the Bible known as "Numbers"—Himself denies that He would ever have occasion to "repent" or be capable of doing so:

> Numbers 23: 19 God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent. . . .

This verse—this bit of God's "testimony"—of course directly contradicts Genesis 6: 6, cited above. It appears that either God "inspired" the book of Numbers, but did not "inspire" the book of Genesis—or perhaps, vice-versa. This is clearly another of the many contradictory "testimonies" found throughout the purported "Word" of God.

Actually it was our intention to call the reader's attention to the Genesis passage which tells of God's "repenting," merely as a prologue to the Flood story, but we could not avoid the temptation to comment on the several strange elements in this "prologue." The story continues:

> Genesis 6: 8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord . . . and God said to Noah . . . behold, I will destroy them (all flesh). . . . Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch; and this shall be its measurement: the length 300 cubits, the breadth 50 cubits, the height 30 cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark . . . and the door set in the side; (with) lower, second, and third storeys shalt thou make it. And behold, I, even I, do (=shall) bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh. . . . But thou shalt come into the ark, thou and thy sons and thy wife and thy sons' wives . . . and of every living thing of all flesh, two of each kind shalt thou bring into the ark: they shall be male and female . . . (and) thus did Noah as God commanded. . . .

We now learn of the onset of the Flood:

> Genesis 7: 4 For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights. . . . And it came to pass after seven days . . . (that) the waters of the Flood were upon the earth. . . . The windows of heaven were opened . . and the flood was forty days upon the earth. . . . And the ark went

> upon the face of the waters . . . and all the high hills were covered. . . . And the waters prevailed . . an hundred and fifty days. . . .

How the Flood abated, we find narrated a few verses on:

> Genesis 8: 1 And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged (=subsided). . . . And the windows of heaven were stopped . . . and the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. . . . And at the end of forty days . . Noah opened the window of the ark . . . and he sent forth a raven which went forth to and fro until the waters were dried up. . . . Also he sent forth a dove . . . to see if the waters were abated from . . . the ground, but the dove found no rest for her foot and she returned . . . and he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and the dove returned, and lo, in her mouth an olive leaf . . . so Noah knew that the waters were abated . . . and he stayed yet another seven days and sent forth the dove which returned not again. . . . And Noah went forth, and builded an altar to the Lord . . . and offered burnt offerings . . . and the Lord smelled a sweet savor. . . .

In 1872, George Smith, who was examining some clay tablets which had been excavated at the site of the ancient city of Nineveh in Babylonia, suddenly made a startling discovery in the dimly lighted room of a London museum. The tablets were inscribed with cuneiform writing, a method of "writing" (as we have previously indicated) much more ancient than Hebrew "script," and far and away older than the alphabets we are familiar with. Smith had made a study of cuneiform as a hobby for some ten years and his eye caught an allusion to a ship resting on a mountain (the mountain of Nisir), followed by an account of a dove being sent forth and returning when it could find no resting place. His every faculty was now alert, because he recognized the possibility that here, amongst ancient fragments he had been examining, might be an older account of the Genesis Flood story.

He proceeded to patiently piece together a number of these fragments (sorted out of thousands), as we would put together a jig-saw puzzle, until the story stood forth. He reported his find to the Society of Biblical Archaeology, and in his report declared that it was

> . . . apparent that the events of the Flood narrated in the Bible and on the cuneiform tablets are the same and occur in the same order. . . .

This quotation is from the "Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology" Vol. 2, 1873, p. 213.

Although George Smith's cuneiform tablets date back only to the seventh century B.C., the epic poem of Gilgamesh, of which the Babylonian Flood story was an integral part, was written about 2000 B.C. by a poet of Babylon, whose very name is lost to us. The tablets tell the story of Utnapishtim (the Babylonian "Noah"), and how he escaped the Flood. Like the gods of the Israelites, the gods of Shuruppak, we are told, had decided to destroy mankind by a flood. The god "Ea" advises Utnapishtim, as follows:

> Tear down thy house, and build a ship
>
> . . . .
>
> Take aboard the seed of all living things.
> The ship thou art to build,
> Her dimensions shall be according to measure,
> Equal her width and her length. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> The children carried pitch
> While the older folk brought all else needful
>
> . . . .
>
> Ten dozen cubits the height of her walls
> Ten dozen cubits each edge of her square deck. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> I provided her with six decks. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> On the seventh day the ship was completed
>
> . . . .
>
> I brought into the ship all my family and household,
> The cattle of the field, and wild creatures. . . .

Now the poet describes the storm's approach:

> I watched the appearance of the sky . . .
> It was awesome to behold . . .
> I boarded the ship and battened up the gate
>
> . . . .
>
> Black clouds rose from the horizon
>
> . . . .
>
> The land was overwhelmed.
> The flood wind (blew), gathering speed as it blew,
> Overtaking the (people?) like a battle
>
> . . . .
>
> The very gods were frightened by the deluge
>
> . . . .
>
> Six days and six nights
> The flood winds swept over the land.
> When the seventh day arrived,
> The flood winds ceased.
> All mankind was destroyed. . . .

The Flood begins to abate, and we read:

> On Mount Nisir the ship stranded
>
> . . . .
> When the seventh day (after stranding) arrived,
> I sent forth a dove, letting it free;
> Not finding a resting place, the dove came back.
> (Later) I sent forth . . . a raven.
> The raven went forth, and apparently the waters had abated
> For he . . . did not return.
> I opened the gate of the boat and let all out . . .
> Then I offered a sacrifice
>
> . . . .
> The gods smelled the savor (of the sacrifice)
> The gods smelled the sweet savor. . . .

Similarly in Genesis, we read that Noah (when the flood had abated) "went forth and builded an altar," and offered a sacrifice (burnt offerings) and "the Lord smelled a sweet savor." Similarly, too, we read of the release of a dove and a raven in the Genesis story. The god of Utnapishtim gives specific measurements to which the ship should be built, and in a similar manner "the Lord" (Yahweh) gave Noah specific measurements. Just so too, the "ark" of Utnapishtim finally comes to rest on a mountain, as Noah's ship did also. Likewise, Noah's ark had to be built in seven days (Noah's god said "for yet seven days and then I will cause it to rain upon the earth 40 days and nights") and Utnapishtim's vessel is completed "on the SEVENTH day."

Not only are the events the same, but they occur in the same order in both accounts. As J. B. Pritchard, in his excellent "Archaeology and the Old Testament," remarks:

> The points of agreement in the structure of the plots (of both stories) make it clear that the Hebrew version . . . goes back to (that is, is derived from) the Babylonian . . . we can say that the Hebrew writers made use of traditions which were ready to hand as a means for presenting their own views about religion and life. . . .

In short, the Hebrew writers were borrowing or plagiarizing tales from the Babylonian mythology, and were not relating events REVEALED to them by God.

We might mention here also that there are apparently two versions of the Flood legend in Genesis, just as we formerly discovered in Genesis two versions of the Creation myth, the only difference being that in the case of the Creation story, the versions are separate, and one follows the other, whereas in the case of the Flood narration, the strands of the two versions are intermingled together. To illustrate, in the Noah story, we are first informed that God had commanded Noah to take two of each kind into the ark:

> Genesis 6: 19 And of every living thing of all flesh two of every kind shalt thou bring in the ark. . . .

A little later however we are told that the Lord commanded Noah to take "seven" of certain species:

> Genesis 7: 2 Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by SEVENS . . . and of unclean beasts by two. . . .

Shortly after, the story reverts to the former version, where Noah is required to take only "two" of each species:

> Genesis 7: 7-8 And Noah went in and his sons. . . . And of clean beasts AND of unclean beasts . . . there went in two and two . . . AS GOD HAD COMMANDED. . . .

The two versions overlap and intermingle once more when we are told of the duration of the flood:

> Genesis 7: 17 And the Flood was 40 days upon the earth. . . .

> Genesis 7: 24 And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days. . . .

On the other hand, when we consult Genesis 7: 6-12, we find that the Flood must indeed have lasted 61 days, as a little computation on the reader's part will rapidly establish. Perhaps these verses (indicating a duration of 61 days, as contrasted to the 40 and 150 days' duration given by the other versions) represent the vestiges of a THIRD version of the Flood, mixed in with the other two versions.

We might note too, merely as a curiosity, that in making his sacrifices, Noah took one of every "clean" beast and one of every "clean" fowl, and if there had been only a single pair of each on the ark, the sacrifice of one of any species would have meant the probable loss of that species. We could of course be mistaken on this point, if we could be certain that all of the "clean" species had proliferated and multiplied during their short stay on the ark.

Contradictions in the text and inconsistencies in the story of Creation, and in the story of the Deluge, etc., if they indicate nothing else, are evidence of the human composition of the Bible. The fact that many of the stories and "idea patterns" in the Bible can now be traced by archaeologists and scholars to cuneiform inscriptions, would seem to confirm this evidence, and the findings of science (in the sense of "organized knowledge") overwhelmingly substantiate these archaeological data, verifying as these findings do, that the human species, instead of being created by a sudden act of God (as related in Genesis), evolved from a less complex ancestry, over a vast period of geologic time. This is not to say that we descended from apes. Man appears to have "ascended" along a different line of evolution entirely.

We could theorize that God created "matter" (or "energy"), which is of such amazing consistence and complexity that—under favorable conditions—it would automatically evolve into "life"; further, that "life" could emerge into "consciousness" under proper circumstances. Faith could carry us one step farther, and we might believe that possibly the nebulous conscious personality which each of us possesses may have the inherent potentiality of developing into some sort of "spiritual" (for want of a better word) or "immaterial" immortality, which would enable us (for example) to see without eyes, and walk without muscles, etc., as we do in dreams:

> To die—to sleep—
> To sleep! perchance to dream
> And in that sleep of death, mayhap,
> Dreams will come. . . .

But let us return to the Flood stories. In all of these stories, a virtuous man is warned by his god of an impending general flood that will destroy mankind and this virtuous man is instructed to build an ark or vessel, and to convey thereon his kin, birds, and beasts, etc. In all instances, the fact of the Flood's subsidence is tested by the sending forth of birds, and is celebrated by a sacrifice afterwards. The kinship of the Flood tales is undeniable, and the greater antiquity of cuneiform writing is so firmly established that it is evident that the authors of Genesis borrowed from the Babylonian and ancient Sumerian mythologies, and did not receive their information from God, via revelation.

The conclusion stated in the foregoing paragraph also satisfactorily relieves our mind of the uncertainty and doubt with which we are forced, by the logic of facts, to regard the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Biblical text, and the multiplication of versions, in what purports to be the Word of God. Even if—to grant what it is impossible to grant—even if it could be established that the clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform did not antedate the Hebrew composition of Genesis, yet the clear evidences for human composition of the Bible would remain. The greater antiquity of cuneiform inscriptions merely serves to corroborate the overwhelming evidence for human composition which the Bible ITSELF provides.

At this point we might mention and list for the reader just a few more curiously contradictory and inconsistent passages in Genesis and elsewhere, all of which are definite pieces of evidence, pointing to the HUMAN composition of the Bible:

(1) In Genesis 32: 27-30, we are told that Jacob's change of name took place at Peniel:

> And he said unto Jacob, what is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said thy name shall be called Jacob no more, but Israel . . . and Jacob called the name of the place Peniel. . . .

Yet in Genesis 35: 10-15, we learn that the change of name took place, not at Peniel, but at Bethel:

> And God said unto him, thy name is Jacob; thy name shall not be called Jacob any more, but Israel shall be thy name . . . and Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him Bethel. . . .

To add to the confusion, in Genesis 28: 10-22, we are given yet another entirely different origin of "Bethel," thus piling contradiction upon contradiction.

> (2) We read in Numbers 22: 20: And God came unto Balaam at night and said . . . if the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them. . . .

Yet in Numbers 22: 21, we read "And God's anger was kindled because he went." Had God forgotten that He had given Balaam permission to go? In connection with this passage in Numbers, we might call attention to the intrinsically absurd circumstance of an ass "talking" to Balaam. (See Numbers 22: 28.)

(3) In later books of the Old and New Testament, Moses is named as the author of Deuteronomy, yet in Deuteronomy 34: 5-6, we are taught:

> So Moses . . . died in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab . . . but no man knoweth of his sepulcher (that is, where it is located) unto this day. . . .

These verses indicate that another person than Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy, inasmuch as Moses could not have written about his own death and burial. These verses also establish that Deuteronomy was written at a time far removed from the event, which the use of the phrase "unto this day" clearly verifies.

(4) In Genesis 20: 1-2, it is related of Abraham that he sojourned in Gerar:

> And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister . . . and Abimelech, King of Gerar, sent and took Sarah. . . .

But the very same thing is related later about Isaac, in Genesis 26: 1 and 7:

> And Isaac went unto Abimelech King of the Philistines unto Gerar . . . and the men of the place asked of his wife, and he (Isaac) said: She is my sister. . . .

But in Genesis 12: 5, we had also already been previously told:

> Abram took Sarai his wife and went down into Egypt . . . and it came to pass when he came near to enter into Egypt that he said unto Sarai his wife . . . thou art fair to look upon: therefore say thou art my sister (so that the Egyptians would not kill him for her sake) . . . and the princes of Pharaoh saw her and . . . the woman was taken into the Pharaoh's house. . . .

We might add that when the Pharaoh was "attracted" to Sarah, she was 90 years of age, according to Genesis 17: 17, a circumstance which adds nothing to the credibility of the story.

(5) In Ezekiel 26: 1, Ezekiel tells us the word of the Lord came unto him, and he prophesied the devastation by Nebuchadnezzar of the city of Tyre, but this prophecy was NOT fulfilled. We subsequently learn (in Ezekiel 29: 17-20) that Nebuchadnezzar will be compensated for God's "erroneous" prophecy by being permitted to spoil and ravage Egypt instead. In Ezekiel 26: 1-5, Ezekiel tells us:

> The word of the Lord came unto me, saying . . . thus saith the Lord God: Behold I am against thee, O Tyrus (the city of Tyre) and will cause many nations to come up against thee . . . and they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus and break down her towers . . . I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (who shall utterly destroy her). . . .

Ezekiel continues to paint a picture of utmost desolation to be wrought by Nebuchadnezzar. But later we learn that the prophecy which God had presumably communicated to Ezekiel could not, for some reason, be fulfilled. Why God was powerless to deliver Tyre over to Nebuchadnezzar (as He had promised), we are never told. Then follows a new prophecy, again purportedly emanating from God:

> Ezekiel 29: 17-20 Thus saith the Lord God . . . behold I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadnezzar. . . .

The city of Tyre was apparently just too much for God. Perhaps her fortifications were sturdier than He had anticipated or her staunch defenders baffled His will. How it must have annoyed and angered Ezekiel to see his God frustrated and his prophecy set at naught! The instance of Tyre is particularly notable because, as Thomas Paine pointed out, these Ezekiel passages demonstrate

> . . . that the theory of Divine Inspiration with its claim of infallibility for the content of revelation was NOT intended by the Scripture itself. . . .

The "divinely" inspired prophecy recited by Ezekiel is not fulfilled: Tyre is not destroyed nor spoiled by Nebuchadnezzar—contrary to God's prophecy. So Ezekiel blithely announces a new "divinely" inspired prophecy, that Nebuchadnezzar will over-run and spoil Egypt instead—with no assurance that this new prophecy will be fulfilled other than his repeated catch-phrase "Thus saith the Lord God." But if the first prophecy "revealed" to him was wrong, perhaps the second might be mistaken too. Thus by implication, the book of Ezekiel tells us that God's revelations, prophecies and promises are not infallible, and are not therefore always to be counted on. A perilous doctrine certainly.

(6) In 2 Samuel 24: 1, we read that David is moved by God to take a census:

> And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, go number Israel and Judah. . . .

Yet in 1 Chronicles 21: 1, we are informed that it was not God, but Satan who provoked David to take the census:

> And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David, to number Israel. . . .

Are we to understand from these two parallel passages, that the inspired writers of the books of the Old Testament believed that the "Lord God" and "Satan" were one and the same Being?

(7) In 2 Kings 2: 11, we learn that "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven," which contradicts the passage in the gospel of John which tells us:

> John 3: 13 No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man (viz., Jesus). . . .

(8) In Genesis 32: 30, we read "I have seen God face to face," but this is contradicted by 1 John 4: 12, which teaches us:

> No man hath seen God at any time. . . .

And so on, and on, and on, one passage contradicting another until, bewildered by the Bible's inconsistencies, contradictions, and manifest errors, we are brought up against the realization that the claim of infallibility often made on behalf of the Bible, not only has no basis in fact, but is patently ridiculous. However, the reader should be cautioned that even if the belief or doctrine that the Bible is God's Word must necessarily be discarded, the fact that we jettison this dogma in no way involves the rejection of the great ethical teachings of Jesus, Amos, Micah, Isaiah or Paul, or other great truths found between the covers of this great book.

In connection with the stories of the Universal Flood related in Genesis and on the cuneiform clay tablets of dim antiquity in the Far East, we might point out that the Egyptian "Bible" or Book of the Dead, which is by all accounts the most ancient of all "sacred" books, has NO RECORD of such a universal deluge. As a matter of fact, scholars advise us that

> . . . the pyramids were building when according to Bible chronology the whole world was under the waters of the universal flood. . . .

Similarly, other nations of great antiquity record no tradition of a general flood. It therefore would appear that the Flood of which the Babylonian-Chaldean-Hebrew tradition speaks was a flood of limited and local extent, though it may still have been, relatively, quite extensive; but it could hardly have been a flood that covered every portion of the earth.

There is usually some germ of historical truth in "legends" as distinguished from pure myths, and we do not doubt for a moment that some considerable geographical area was devastated by a flood at some relatively "recent" stage of prehistoric time, and that the memory of it was preserved in the legend which first reaches those of Christian and Jewish rearing through the pages of the Bible. Like other early epics of man, the Bible is a priceless and fascinating composition, but when we insist it is sacred or divinely revealed history, our insistence, it seems to me, becomes rather absurd. Similarly to insist that Homer's "Odyssey," with its Circe, Sirens, and One-Eyed Cyclops, is factual history, would be equally preposterous.

The Bible preserves in deathless amber not only many early legends of our race, but also records man's early conception of God, and is therefore a book of great and inestimable prize. But its tremendous value does not of itself establish it as the work of a super-natural or Divine revelation. All the evidence that we are able to discover is in point of fact contrary to such a conclusion.

To illustrate how a legend may hold some germ of truth, but not sustain the conclusions claimed on its behalf, we might quote the verse in Genesis, which tells us:

> Genesis 6: 4 There were giants in the earth in those days. . . .

This legend of giants may very well derive from the fact that primitive and prehistoric man often found huge individual bones, which he had no way of knowing, for example, were the scattered bones of the huge dinosaurs of the prime, and which he therefore may have concluded were relics of giants who had roamed the earth in more ancient times. Many early myths involve giants, who are sometimes even represented as storming the fastness of heaven, as witness the Titans who tried to storm Olympus, fabled home of the Greek Gods, and piled mountain upon mountain in an attempt to reach its lofty heights.

Who knows but that the observation by primitive man of sea shells or the remains of aquatic animals in places far above the level of the sea and on seemingly inaccessible high mountain ranges (facts now quite adequately explained by geologists) may have given rise to the first legends of a great and universal flood. As a consequence, some story or myth had to be invented to explain or account for the survival of the human race.

It was probably a deep-seated wish to account for one phenomenon or another in the world about them, that prompted early man to attempt some explanation, and gave rise to many early myths. For instance, there are many ancient stories narrated to account for what we call the "confusion of tongues" or the many diverse languages which men speak—and spoke, even of old, before the dawn of recorded history. The most familiar is the story of the Tower of Babel, related in Genesis:

> Genesis 11: 1-9 And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. And . . . (the children of the sons of Noah) . . . found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there . . . and they said, Go to (the well-known Elizabethan phrase), let us build a city and a tower whose top (may reach) unto heaven and let us make us a name . . . and the Lord came down to see the . . . tower . . . and the Lord said, Behold, the people are one and they have all one language . . . and now nothing will be restrained from them . . . go to, let US (the writers of Genesis believed that not one God, but many gods controlled

> the workings of the world)—let US go down and there confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech . . . therefore is the name of it called Babel, because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth. . . .

We know today that building a tower up to "heaven" would not only be a physical impossibility because of the isolation of our sphere in space, but also impossible because apparently there is no heaven that can be "geographically" located by our telescopes swinging and probing the length and breadth of the Universe. But the writers (let it be carefully noted, the HUMAN writers) of Genesis did not know this at that time. Had God been the Author indeed or even the Inspirer of the Bible, which we mistakenly revere as His Word, He would have been aware of these astronomical facts and would not have "revealed" or communicated so preposterous a story to account for the confusion (or diversity) of tongues.

Furthermore, God would not have pretended that He feared that men, if left alone, might accomplish such a feat as to build a tower that would reach to Heaven, nor would He suggest that in order to place an obstacle in their path, He confounded their language, making each talk in a different tongue, so that they would not understand one another, and so presumably have their progress toward this impossible goal impeded or forever frustrated.

When we reflect upon this passage, along with others in the Scriptures, we might well hesitate to declare that the Bible is God's Word or revelation, for by so declaring, we would (1) be branding God with ignorance of the facts of astronomy or the findings of the science of philology (which investigates the development of languages), or (2) we would be accusing Him of deliberate deception. Both alternatives are ridiculously incredible.

More credible by far is the alternative we have repeatedly suggested, namely that men wrote the books of the Bible WITHOUT any supernatural assistance. Acceptance of this particular alternative would explain the contradictions, inconsistencies, errors, and other evidences of ordinary human composition found in such plenitude in the Bible.

The Bible ascribes the desire of men to "make themselves a name" as the reason the building of the Tower of Babel was undertaken. Ancient Armenian legend says pride and envy caused men to form a "godless" resolve to build a high tower, but the tower was toppled by a great wind and "unknown words" were at the same time blown about among men. The Hindoo version tells of a tall tree which reached "almost to heaven" but Brahma, to punish the tree's pride (this is no more absurd than the Bible story), cut off its branches which, when cast to earth, sprang up as "wata" trees and made "differences of speech" and differences of customs to prevail on earth.

Even ancient Mexican legend says that the remnant saved from a Deluge decided to build a tower reaching to the skies, to have a place of refuge in the event of another flood, and to see what was going on in Heaven. When the edifice neared the clouds, the "gods" became irritated and hurled fire upon the pyramid. The work was then discontinued, we are told, because each family interested in the building of the tower received "a language of their own."

The ancients apparently felt that there must be a "mystic" reason for the many languages spoken by different tribes and races of men, and some ancient poet or fable-writer, whose name is lost in the mists of antiquity, invented the story which has come down to us. In every version of this story, the diversity of languages is somehow connected with an attempt on the part of humans to "reach" or scale the parapets of heaven, a connection which neither logic nor historical event could possibly justify, leading us to infer that this story—as widespread as the Flood story in the early cultures of man—was a myth of the purest water.

On the other hand, the Flood story (as we suggested above) could have been a vestigial "legend" of some actual flood of wide incidence, which however did not reach the proportions of a "general" flood. The most ancient record of this flood legend yet unearthed was found in recent years, in the inscriptions on cuneiform tablets of the ancient Sumerians, whom some scholars and historians now believe were the actual inventors of the earliest human "writing."

The cuneiform tablets of Sumeria, recovered by archaeologists, date from the third millenium B. C. The hero of the Sumerian story, Ziusudra, was a righteous man like Noah and the Babylonian Utnapishtim, and like them too, he is warned of the gods' determination to "destroy the seed of mankind." Sumerian clay tablets, cleared of the dust of ages, tell us:

> All the windstorms . . . attacked as one
>
> . . . .
>
> For SEVEN days and SEVEN nights
> The flood waters swept over the land . . .
> The huge ark . . . tossed . . . on the great waters
>
> . . . .
>
> Ziusudra opened a window of the great boat . . .

> Utu brought his rays into the boat ("sunshine"
> probably indicating that the flood was over)
>
> . . . .
>
> Ziusudra, the King, prostrates himself before Utu,
> The king kills an ox, slaughters a sheep.

So again, like Utnapishtim and Noah, Ziusudra's first act after the flood has abated, is to make a sacrifice. The kinship of all the Flood stories is again evident, but to further clinch and corroborate this kinship BEYOND THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT, we might mention a most peculiar and remarkable circumstance. The cuneiform tablets disclose that Ziusudra was the TENTH king since the Creation, and the Bible provides the information that Noah was the TENTH "patriarch" since Creation. In one case, ten kingly reigns extend between the Creation and the Flood, and in the other case ten patriarchal eras intervene between the Creation and the Flood. Now this in itself might be a matter of the merest coincidence, but what makes the coincidence eminently significant—significant to an outstanding degree—and provides this would-be run-of-the-mill coincidence with a conclusiveness that carries a momentous impact for the purposes of our demonstration, is the FACT that in both stories the predecessors of the Flood hero were all noted for fantastic longevity.

A quotation in part from the Sumerian so-called "Dilmun" poem and other Sumerian sources, will serve as a basis of comparison with the purportedly long-lived Biblical patriarchs:

> In Eridu, Alulim (Alorus) was king, reigning 28,800 years. Alalgar reigned 36,000 years. . . . In Badtibira Enmenluanna reigned 43,200 years, (and so on down the list). . . .

Let us now compare this Sumerian catalogue of kings with the Fifth Chapter of Genesis:

> And all the days that Adam lived were 930 years. . . . All the days of Seth were 912 years . . . (and so on down to Methuselah) . . . and all the days of Methuselah were 969 years. . . .

There can be no doubt at all that the resemblance of fact and circumstance is so striking and so strong that coincidence or fortuity must be ruled out.

As a consequence, it seems altogether certain that God did not reveal the story of Noah to the Hebrew "sacred" writers. These Hebrew writers, like the Assyrian scribes before them, and like the ancient poets of old Babylonia before their Assyrian predecessors, all borrowed from each other successively, and eventually derived their story from the Sumerians, who may indeed—as we may one day learn—have themselves borrowed the tale from the mythology of even more ancient peoples yet unknown to history, and from civilizations yet unexcavated.

One important conclusion is that this story and other stories related in Genesis, which have long been considered "historical" events purportedly revealed by God to man, now appear to be events derived from ancient mythologies. It is true that these ancient myths have been refurbished and dressed up in a new language, and have been given a new "religious" or moral interpretation. But the fact—which we concede—that the re-interpretation by the Israelites has much improved these early tales and given them additional "moral" power, does not change their character as human compositions, nor transform them into Divine "revelations," nor does it alter the fact that they are NOT historic events, but must be regarded as myths (stories invented by men before the dawn of written history). As such, they should not be seriously accepted as the basis of any religion, Jewish, Christian, or other.

Meanwhile, one would expect that if the Hebrew writers of Genesis borrowed the myths of their predecessors, they might also have borrowed some of their laws, and this is indeed the case. Codified cuneiform laws have already been discovered older by far than the famous Code of Hammurabi, which was itself reduced to writing at the time of the Hebrew patriarchs. The most ancient cuneiform codes uncovered by archaeologists are older than the "legal" portions of the Bible, and along with the Code of Hammurabi, these codes of law contain some interesting correspondences and resemblances to the old Hebraic law found in the Bible. For example, in the Code of Hammurabi, we find this ordinance:

> If a seignior (one of the "upper" class) has destroyed the eye of another seignior, his eye shall be destroyed; if he has broken another seignior's bone, they shall break his bone; if a seignior has knocked out a tooth of a seignior, his tooth shall be knocked out. . . .

This decree reminds us of the passage in Exodus, where the law of "God" is set down:

> Exodus 21: 24-25 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, burning for burning, (etc.). . . .

The passage in Leviticus follows the same strain:

> Leviticus 24: 19 If a man injure his neighbor, as he hath done, it shall be done unto him. . . .

Again, a cuneiform code law relating to rape states that "if a man seize a woman in the mountains, it is the man's crime and he will be killed. But if he seize her in her house, it is the woman's crime and she shall be killed." Deuteronomy records a similar law and explains the "reason" for this ancient bit of "common law":

> Deuteronomy 22: 23-27 If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto a man and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; then ye shall bring them both unto the gate of the city and stone them that they die . . . the damsel, because she cried not out, being in the city. . . . But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field and the man force her and lie with her, then the man only shall die, but unto the damsel thou shall do nothing . . . for he found her in the field . . . the damsel cried out and there was none to save her. . . .

In still another place, the cuneiform law states that "if an ox is known to gore habitually, but the ox is not de-horned, if it gores a man and kills him, the owner of the ox shall pay a fine of silver." This bit of ancient jurisprudence has its parallel in Exodus:

> Exodus 21: 28-29 If an ox gore a man or woman that they die, then the ox shall be stoned and his flesh eaten, but the owner of the ox shall not be punished. But if the ox were wont (=accustomed) to push with his horn in time past and it hath been testified to the owner and he hath not kept him in (i.e., confined him), the ox shall be stoned and his owner shall also be put to death. . . .

Looking into the past can be richly rewarding and prove not only fascinating, but enlightening as well. Not having the leisure nor the training, nor the financial backing necessary to be an archaeologist in the field, should not and does not shut us away from the excitement of archaeological discovery. One such discovery, of particular interest and significance not only for their content, but also for the place of their discovery, comprised the Babylonian cuneiform tablets found in 1887 at El-Amarna, which is located 200 miles south of Cairo, Egypt. The fact that they were found so far south in Egypt is of great help to us, because it establishes the fact that the ancient Babylonian myths incorporated in these tablets were widely diffused in the ancient world, and were therefore available to anyone not only in Egypt, but more importantly for our purposes, were available to the Hebrew so-called "sacred" writers, who lived in an area intermediate between Babylonia and Egypt.

The El-Amarna tablets were actually documents from the "Foreign Office" file of two Egyptian kings who reigned about 1400 B.C. One of these kings, by name Akh-en-Aton, was incidentally the only Egyptian monarch who refused to believe in the "Trinity" the Egyptians had traditionally worshipped for centuries, and rejected the absurd "half-animal" gods and nonsensical religious beliefs in favor of his own steadfast belief in ONE GOD of all peoples, rightly declining to accept the preposterous notion that each nation had its own gods, and the absurd idea then much in vogue that each god, like Yahweh, had his own "chosen people."

That that Entity, whom we regard as Creator, should look with partiality or favoritism on any one race or tribe of men is morally unthinkable, and Akh-en-Aton deserves utmost praise for having the strength of mind to see this, and the courage to try to overcome such dubiously authentic traditional religious beliefs and practices. Unfortunately, he was centuries ahead of his time—perhaps, even ahead of ours—and, upon his death, the Egyptian people marched straight back to their ancient gods, their absurd Trinity (they had one too, way back then), and their ancient ways of worship—so strong is habit and custom over reasonableness, sanity, and tolerance in religious outlook.

In the Babylonian myth recorded on the El-Amarna tablets, as in the Genesis story of Adam, the man in the story misses the opportunity for immortality too, but in the case of the Babylonian tale, he misses it because he REFUSES to eat the food that would have made him immortal, which is proffered to him by God; whereas in Genesis, as we know, Adam misses immortality because he eats of the fruit purportedly forbidden by God.

The idea that eating of a certain food would impart immortality is a common (and when we reflect upon it, an altogether absurd) motif in the pattern of Near Eastern thought: and the idea is equally absurd whether we find it in the Bible, the Arabian Nights, the El-Amarna tablets, or elsewhere. Another point of resemblance in the Babylonian and Biblical tales is, that just as Eve in the Genesis story is persuaded to eat by a "super-natural" agent (disguised as a serpent), so Adapa (the man in the Babylonian tale) is persuaded NOT to eat, and also by a "super-natural" entity.

Of course, as we have observed previously, Adam and Eve were not actually forbidden (in the Genesis story) to eat of the Tree of Life, whose fruit, it is suggested, would give them immortality; and as we have indicated earlier in this chapter, it seems passing strange that they should not have eaten of its life-giving fruit at one time or another. According to the story, they were commanded not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but could eat freely of the fruit of the Tree of Life.

Then, as Adam and Eve are about to be expelled from the garden, the human author, his memory apparently returning to the ancient stories from which he was borrowing, in which there was no Tree of Knowledge, but in which there was always a Tree of Life, suddenly adds that Adam was driven out of the garden

> . . . lest he put forth his hand and take "ALSO" of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever. . . .
>
> —*Genesis* 3: 22

Yet until this abrupt mention of it, this Parthian shot, nothing much had been made or said of this OTHER tree. It is for all the world as though a witness on the stand had inadvertently made a damaging slip in his answer to a question as he left the stand, making the truth at once evident to the jurors who must judge the issue.

Chapter Four: The Unvirgin Birth

Just as the early Christian gospel-writers claimed the miracle of "walking on water" for their supposed god Jesus, and for his disciple Peter, just so these same Christian writers, not to be outdone by the adherents of other gods, claimed the miracle of virgin birth for their god too; although again, as in the case of the miracle of walking on water, the miracle of virgin birth had been claimed, long before the Christian era, for Buddha and other "gods" whose purported incarnations (appearances on earth) were chronicled centuries before the birth of Jesus.

It is recorded for example that Buddha was born of the Virgin "Maya," a name curiously similar to the Christian Virgin "Mary," leading some to suggest that possibly even the very name of Jesus' mother may have been a name borrowed and adapted from the Buddhist saga, rather than the name of a genuine person. Curious, too, is the apparent similitude between the appellation "Christ" applied to Jesus and the name "Crishna," under which the most famous incarnation of Vishnu took place.

In my opinion this similarity of nomenclature (Maya and Mary and Crishna and Christ) was a matter of coincidence and cannot be used as the basis for any larger inferences. We can say this with some degree of confidence because we know that the English word "Christ" derives from the Greek word "Christos," the word used by ancient Greek scholars to translate the Hebrew word for Messiah.

Of course, the Greek word "Christos" originally had no special sacred signification, meaning simply "the anointed one," and was therefore frequently applied to earthly rulers whose high office required that they be ceremonially anointed. For example, Cyrus, King of Persia, was called "the Christ," viz., Cyrus Christos, signifying "Cyrus the Christ" or "Cyrus the Anointed One." (See Isaiah 45: 1)

When the Hebrew words meaning "Jesus, the Messiah" were translated into Greek, they became "Jesus, Christos" (viz., Jesus, the anointed one). But unfortunately, after a few generations, the word "christos" lost its original function as an epithet, and was given a new theological meaning never intended by the first Greek translators. Eventually, as we know, the word "Christ" came to be regarded, if not as an integral part of Jesus' name, at least as an epithet to be applied exclusively to Jesus.

Crishna (or Krishnu) was the "incarnation" of the Indian god Vishnu who, coincidentally with Jesus, was said to be the "Second Person" of a Trinity (i. e., the Sacred Trinity of India). He too—again like Jesus and Buddha—was supposedly born of a chaste virgin, whose name was Devaki. Like the Christian Mary, Devaki came to be known as "the Mother of God."

We Christians might be altogether justified in regarding the "virgin" births of Buddha and Crishna (and others) as pure mythical inventions, because virgin births are neither credible nor probable, inasmuch as they do not follow the course of nature as we know it. But, alas and alack, if we refuse to believe the stories of these virgin births, by what perversion of reason or logic can we accept the tale of Jesus' virgin birth as credible and probable?

It seems to me that in this respect we must at least be consistent, and reject the ancient reports of all such miracles of virgin birth as unbelievable and improbable or accept ALL on the same footing as equally worthy of our belief. This would mean that we would be obliged to accept the tales regarding the miraculous virgin births of Crishna and Buddha as factually true if we insist on accepting the report of Jesus' virgin birth as an historic fact—rather than regarding it as a legend borrowed by his early followers to show that one whom they conceived to be their own particular "god" was as miraculously conceived as other "gods" already established in worship at Jesus' death.

With this brief indication of the possibility that the entire story of the Virgin Birth may have been a fable borrowed from more ancient pagan writings telling of other gods presumably conceived by virgins, let us examine the Bible record itself and determine, if we can, from evidence which the Bible itself provides, either that the so-called virgin birth was historic (=actually happened) or was a myth (=never happened). If the evidence in the Bible itself conclusively shows that the story of Jesus' virgin birth is an undoubted myth, there would then be little need to cite these other more ancient tales of "virgin birth" to demonstrate that the story of the virgin birth of Jesus in the Bible may indeed have been borrowed or adapted from these older pagan documents, in an attempt to establish proof of Jesus' more-than-human origin.

We have already shown that the story of Creation, the story of the garden of Eden and the Fall of Man, as well as the story of the Flood, etc., were stories apparently borrowed from more ancient pagan writings, and adapted to the Biblical writers' own purposes by the anonymous authors of Genesis.

When we proceed to delve into the matter, we find considerable evidence in the Bible which denies the Virgin Birth. In fact, so ample and varied is this contrary evidence, that one might well be led to wonder why this miraculous tale of Jesus' birth is ever believed at all. We can explain the tale's acceptance only by assuming that we Christians either have long since stopped reading our Bibles with anything approaching comprehension, or that we are so accustomed to reading Scripture with our critical eyes (as we think) "dutifully" shut, that we do not realize the clear significance of what we read. We promptly shed our critical judgment when we open our Bibles, just as we naturally suspend our critical judgment when we read the delightful "Arabian Nights."

In the case of the "Arabian Nights" we accept anything—however absurd—that the author asks us to accept as possible, in order that he may tell his stories. However, the difference—and it is a most important one—is that the author of the Arabian Nights' tales does not expect us to accept what he tells us as soberly and seriously true, but just as "temporarily" true for the sake of the story, whereas on the other hand it is pretended that what is written in the Bible, however improbable, incredible or preposterous, is absolute and historic truth; and is, in fact, the gravest truth possible, the literal Word or Revelation of God. If the Bible IS God's Word, there is no book that we should read with more alert scrutiny and diligent concentration.

Certainly, God's Word should not be read casually or perfunctorily as we might read a romantic novel or a detective mystery story. As a mere courtesy to God, should not we Christians listen to what He has to say—if we accept the Bible as His Word—with the closest attention, and bring our every faculty to bear on what we regard as His revelation? To do otherwise, it seems to me, is to acknowledge that we do not believe it is indeed His Word, and THIS of course may be the simple truth.

Meanwhile many of us do not know, although we may very much like to know, how to separate our sincere and steadfast belief in the Christian virtues and Christian ethic, from our belief in the Divine Authorship of the Bible and from our belief in Jesus' Divinity (as supposedly verified by his miraculous birth and other miracles purportedly performed by Jesus—miracles which however proved exactly nothing to Peter, as we have already seen in Chapter One). Fortunately, we do have a choice. We can believe in and practice the so-named "Christian" virtues even though we may reject the Bible's claim to Divine authorship, and we can believe in God even though we cannot believe He wrote or supernaturally inspired the Bible.

There can be little doubt that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, whom we Christians professedly accept as our God, was a jealous, vengeful and barbaric God, but this does not mean that the God we Christians pray to is jealous, vengeful and barbaric—for the simple reason that the God we worship is actually NOT the "God" of the Bible at all, although many of us have yet to discover this. It is not difficult to confirm the vengeful and barbaric nature of the God of the Bible, for this is abundantly illustrated in the Old Testament, where for example it is pretended that the barbarisms practiced by the Israelites upon the inhabitants of Canaan were done at God's express command. As the Israelites invaded the land which Moses and Joshua assured them God had promised was to be theirs, they cruelly massacred the inhabitants of city after city:

> Joshua 10: 28 ff That day Joshua took the city of Makkedah and smote it with the sword, and the King thereof he destroyed and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain . . . (so with Libnah, so too with Lachish, and Eglon, Hebron, etc.) . . . destroying them utterly and all the souls therein . . . (smiting all the country) of the hills and the south and of the vale and of the springs. . . .

In another place we are told:

> Joshua 10: 40 He (Joshua) utterly destroyed all that breathed AS THE LORD GOD COMMANDED . . . infants, women with child, helpless children, all massacred without mercy, AS GOD COMMANDED. . . .

When the Kings of the Amorites joined their armies together in an attempt to withstand the unprovoked aggression of the Israelite army, God guarantees Joshua the victory:

> Joshua 10: 8 And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear them not for I have delivered them into thine hand . . . (they didn't have a chance you see) . . . and the Lord discomfited (=defeated) them before Israel . . . and as they fled, the Lord cast down great stones from heaven and they died. . . . More died with stones than Israel slew with the sword. . . .

It is interesting and most edifying to picture God pelting the Amorites as they fled. Nor is this all. To give Joshua more time to slaughter those whose lands he was seeking to steal—ostensibly at God's command—Joshua asked God to cause the Sun to stand still in the heavens, and God promptly obliged (or so it is recorded in the Bible):

> Joshua 10: 12-13 Then spake Joshua to the Lord . . . and he said in the sight of Israel: Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon . . . and the Sun stood still . . . until the Israelites had spent their vengeful fury and slaughtered their enemies. . . .

God apparently did not intend to give the Amorites or any others who inhabited the land of Canaan even a sporting chance: even when they were utterly routed and fleeing, He pursued them like an ugly Cyclops monster out of Homer's Odyssey, heaving huge stones after them to crush them, as we might crush a helpless beetle with a stone; and then, when the slaughter was going along at a fine pace, and night threatened to put a halt to the massacre, God (we are told), at Joshua's behest, caused the Sun to stand still, to give the Israelites enough light to finish the ghastly blood-bath.

The Bible plainly tells us further that God not only aided and abetted the slaughter of the inhabitants of the Canaan country, but made sure that they had no opportunity to escape such a fate:

> Joshua 11: 19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites . . . of Gibeon: all others they took in battle BECAUSE GOD HARDENED THEIR HEARTS . . . THAT HE MIGHT DESTROY THEM UTTERLY AND THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE NO MERCY. . . .

In other words, if God had left the Canaanites to the natural inclination of their own judgment, they might have capitulated to the Israelites and sued for peace upon suppliant knee, and thus obtained mercy and escaped annihilation, but God—with what must appear to be diabolical cunning—subtly hardened their hearts (and who can doubt His power to work upon the heart of man?), and with evil craft equal to that attributed to His purported Mighty Opposite, Satan, God so interfered with the exercise of their good judgment, that they could not perceive that surrender and supplication was their safest course in the face of the mighty horde of Israel, sweeping in upon their peaceful lands, as the barbaric Hun was one day to over-run the provinces of the decadent Roman Empire.

Alas, which of us can with a free conscience worship a God of such pitiless savagery or diabolical cunning? And yet we do just that when we insist that the Bible is the Word of our Christian God. In the passages just quoted, if they are in truth a portion of His revelation, He not only acknowledges His wickedness, cruelty and subtle treachery, but openly and brazenly boasts of it and asks us to admire the low cunning with which it is perpetrated. The poor scurrying Canaanites were given no loophole of escape and were granted no quarter by their Mighty Antagonist.

The men, who it is related in the Bible were looked upon with most favor by God, were not particularly admirable either. When the Israelites conquered the Midianites, as it is recorded in Numbers 31: 14, Moses was "wroth" (=enraged) with the captains of the army because they "saved all the women alive" and because all the children of the Midianites had been spared and not given to the edge of the sword. Having properly reprimanded and dressed down the captains for the mercy they had been guilty of showing, Moses then proceeded to issue his own most merciful command to his shame-faced lieutenants:

> Numbers 31: 17-18 Now therefore kill every male child and kill every woman that hath known a man by lying with him. But all females that are still virgin, keep for yourselves. . . .

For one thing, Moses would not have so easily forgotten the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill" and killed without need, had he indeed obtained that commandment from the Hand of God. But the primary significance of this passage consists in the fact that it shows, as nothing else could, how truly merciful and god-like this "man of God" was. All males were to be summarily slain, including mere infants and boys. All mothers and wives too. But the virgin daughters of the Midianites were to be "spared"—if we can use this word—for debauchery. (32,000 women were reserved for this fate, according to "God's Word" in Numbers 31: 35.) A truly noble man, this Moses. After all, he might have slain the Midian daughters too. Can we bring ourselves to believe that God would have favored so bloodthirsty and ruthless a man?

Of course, if it is true that Moses and Joshua were guilty of such barbaric ruthlessness by God's express command—as the Bible teaches us—perhaps the blame should be laid not upon them, but upon God. Following this line of reasoning, perhaps God would prefer all men to be brutal and inhuman too, and perhaps men of Stalin's ilk and men of Hitler's kidney are more to God's liking than earnest humble men who walk a tightrope in their individual lives rather than permit their integrity and dedication to truth and honor to be too much tainted.

It might well behoove us at this point to ponder whether it may not be true that Christians and Jews alike have been maligning God's name these twenty centuries, by associating His name with the Bible so intimately, and "accusing" Him of being its Author. We MUST believe that God is merciful and just, and filled with the spirit of loving-kindness; and therefore when the Bible portrays Him instead as sadistically cruel and capable of meanness and injustice, we are forced to conclude that the Bible is not (and cannot rationally be regarded as) an authentic record of His works and revelation.

Rather than allow any child or teen-ager to read therein that God —the Creator of this majestic Universe—is capable of such ruthless barbarism and ignoble cunning, as is recorded of Him in the Bible, it might be better for us to burn or destroy every copy of this Book. Unfortunately, burning books never solved anything, so let us rather bend our efforts to re-evaluate the Bible, and let it be recognized that it is NOT the work of God's hand, nor a revelation of His acts or wisdom, but strictly a human composition, no more "sacred" or "holy" than the books of Homer or Shakespeare; yet, like other great books, a book to be highly prized and read and re-read for the wisdom and poetry it contains; at the same time, a book to be critically examined like other books, to make us aware of its errors and imperfections.

The Bible is without question a priceless heritage, considered as an ancient chronicle and a symposium of ancient wisdom. It is a book of inestimable worth, wherein we may also trace the unfolding of man's growing conception of God, from a man-like ("anthropomorphic") god, to a God conceived as a Spirit; from a local tribal WAR god, partial to one "chosen" people, to a God conceived as universal and just to all, loving all peoples equally; from a plural god (the Elohim of Genesis), to a God conceived as ONE, from a god of man-like passions, jealousy, rage, sadism, and revenge, to a God of limitless understanding, good will, mercy and love.

The name of God should be freed—once and for all—from any entangling alliance with the Bible, and freed too from the imputation of having "begotten" Jesus. In connection with this latter "doctrine," let us proceed to set forth what evidence the Bible itself provides that the Virgin Birth of Jesus has no basis in fact. We will quote first from Matthew:

> Matthew 1: 1 The book of the generation of Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham. . . .

Here it is clearly stated in God's Word (if we accept it as such) that the genealogy given in the First Chapter of Matthew is the "generation" (=genealogy) of Jesus. It does not say it is Joseph's "generation" as some have tried to claim, to overcome the difficulty that this presentation of Jesus' HUMAN lineage presents to those who would insist on Jesus' DIVINE origin. In Luke 3: 23 another genealogy of Jesus is given, tracing his "human" ancestry through Joseph back to Abraham. If Jesus were indeed born of God without human connection, these genealogies are not only false, but pointless, because according to the story of the Virgin Birth, Jesus was not descended from any man:

> Matthew 1: 18-20 Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child. Joseph her husband being a just man and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily, but while he thought on these things, the Angel of God appeared to him in a dream, saying: Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus. . . .

A little later in the same Gospel, we read:

> Matthew 1: 24-25 Then Joseph did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him and knew her not (abstained from marital relations) till she had brought forth her firstborn son. . . .

In the very first chapter of his Gospel, therefore, the unknown and anonymous author of Matthew declares, first that Jesus was descended from Abraham (Matt. 1: 1-16), and then a few verses later, that Jesus was NOT descended from Abraham (Matt. 1: 18-25), inasmuch as Joseph was no way involved in his begetting. It is quite evident that Jesus could only be descended from Abraham THROUGH Joseph.

We are left with a rather strange choice, for either (1) God was confused (if He is considered to be the Author of the Bible), or (2) those whom God "inspired" could err in what they wrote under His inspiration. The first alternative is obviously impossible to accept. But on the other hand, if we accept the second, namely that those whom God inspired could be in error, even though taught by His competent instruction, how can we accept any of the so-called "inspired" gospels as God's Word?

For if men inspired by God could err in transmitting His revelations, how can we possibly distinguish between the truth as God supernaturally revealed it to them, and the "truth" as garbled and twisted by the agents through whom the inspiration was channelled? If we admit even the possibility of error or confusion on the part of those whom He inspired to write the Gospels, we have no yardstick left by which to judge which portions of the Gospels—or for that matter of the entire Bible—are actually His Word, and which portions are not His Word, but the erroneous misapprehensions or garbled reports of His human agents.

It is our good fortune that we have a third alternative which solves the impossible dilemma presented above. As previously suggested, perhaps after all the Bible is NOT the Word of God at all. This would at once explain the many contradictions and confusions we find in the Bible. If the books of the Bible were written by men without the aid of God, then error, confusion, and contradictory statements are not only possible, but naturally to be anticipated in a document as ancient as the Bible.

It seems to me that we have no option but to accept the third alternative unless we wish either to assume that God was actually ignorant of the facts of Jesus' birth, or unless we wish to charge Him with a deliberate attempt to muddle the issue by choosing unreliable intermediaries to reveal His Word. Acceptance of our third alternative (viz., that the Bible was written by men without the help of God) would also satisfactorily explain why, despite their inclusion of the story of Jesus' "divine" birth, the anonymous author of Matthew and the author of Luke also included "genealogies" of Jesus to establish his descent from David. If either genealogy is correct, it is obvious that Jesus was NOT born by the miracle of virgin birth.

Acceptance of the third alternative would also explain why the genealogy offered in Luke 3: 23 ff is entirely different from the genealogy charted in Matthew 1: 1 ff. One lists 42 generations from Abraham, the other lists 27 generations from Abraham. It follows that at least one genealogical list is spurious, if both are not. If we compare the names in the two genealogies, we discover that there is no similarity in the names listed on the two genealogical schedules, so that it is not a case of some names having been accidentally omitted by one of the gospellists.

The difficulty is that if we accept the Bible as God's Word, we cannot reject either of the genealogies, even though they are not only in conflict with one another, but more importantly, even though both clash with and deny the story of the virgin birth. Our only rational and reverent course, it seems certain, is to reject the Bible as God's Word. To do otherwise under the circumstances would be to grossly malign God, impugn His motives, or question His goodness and moral integrity.

We are willy-nilly forced to conclude that the genealogical tables listed in the First Chapter of Matthew and in the Third Chapter of Luke, could not possibly have come from a Divine source. Human reports may differ without disturbing our equanimity, but if God's revelations were to differ so greatly as to contradict one another, we would have no bottom to which to make fast our anchor of faith. We just cannot conceive God as ignorant of the facts or confused regarding them, nor for that matter as deliberately duplicitous.

Moreover, even if the two genealogical lists in Matthew and Luke were identical in every respect (instead of differing in every possible way), still both would refute the story of Jesus' "divine" lineage, as we have intimated above. Such contradiction piled on contradiction cannot be reconciled with Divine wisdom. The gospels of Matthew and Luke tell contradictory stories regarding Jesus' birth within each gospel itself, and the version of each gospellist's genealogy differs too from that of the other. Greater confusion can hardly be imagined. This is truly "confusion worse confounded." And to add to the confusion, the author of Mark, writing about 65 A.D.—and Mark's gospel is the earliest gospel—says NOTHING of Jesus' "divine" birth. Is not this omission by Mark most significant too?

The author of Mark was closer to the facts than the authors of Matthew and Luke, inasmuch as both of these gospels were written long after the Gospel of Mark. As a matter of fact, it has been determined that the authors of Matthew and Luke merely copied the biographical information that Mark had furnished in his gospel. On this point all Biblical scholars are now in virtually universal and unanimous agreement. It appears certain that if Jesus had been born miraculously, Mark would have reported this circumstance, to edify those whom he addressed. To omit to mention such a wonder amongst the many other wonders he recorded was a grievous oversight indeed, an oversight almost impossible to conceive.

The omission in Mark is at least strong negative evidence which, taken with the positive contradictory evidence in Luke and Matthew, makes it almost certain that the story of the Virgin Birth is inauthentic.

Let us now sweep aside the whole confused business of the "human" genealogies of Jesus, and go on to examine the story of the virgin birth itself, and try to ascertain whether the story as told in the Gospel of Matthew is inconsistent or contradictory, thus again betraying its human origin, and underlining its spuriousness:

> Matthew 1: 22-23 Now all this was done (referring to Jesus' virgin birth) that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child

> and shall bring forth a son and THEY shall call his name Emmanuel. . . .

Matthew attempts to make the incredible story of Jesus' miraculous birth more credible by adducing (1) what he terms a "prophecy," which he further states (2) was a prophecy concerning Jesus, a prophecy which he says further (3) was fulfilled in Jesus' virgin birth. The so-called "prophecy" referred to by Matthew occurs in the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah:

> Isaiah 7: 14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. . . .

The evidence in God's own Word—if we Christians insist on receiving the Bible as such—will establish (1) that there was in fact no prophecy of a "virgin" birth; (2) that if a prophecy was made at all, it had nothing to do with Jesus; and (3) that therefore there could not have been any fulfillment of this prophecy as claimed. We should perhaps first note the simple and stubborn fact that Mary did not name her son "Immanuel" nor did the angel of God (mentioned in Matthew 1: 20), although ostensibly sent by God to bring Isaiah's prophecy to fulfillment, insist that the baby which was to be born of Mary be named Immanuel, AS THE PROPHECY WOULD REQUIRE.

Right here the astute reader will already notice a subtle difference in the original Isaiah text and the text as quoted by Matthew: Isaiah's text tells us that she (the virgin) shall call her son's name Immanuel. In Matthew, we are told that "they" (not "she") shall call his name Immanuel (referring probably to the "people" in Matthew 1: 21 whom the angel declares "Jesus" shall save from their sins). The difference in text may not seem too important nor is it material to our thesis, but it is important because it is just this unauthorized and unwarranted change of reading which makes the usual allegorical interpretation of the prophecy possible. Because the word "Immanuel" means, literally, "God with us," it has been claimed it was an ALLEGORICAL name for Jesus. Matthew says in effect, not that the mother shall call her son's name Immanuel—which is what Isaiah said—but Matthew declares that "they" (the people) shall call him Immanuel, thinking thus to get over the difficulty of the difference in the child's "name" in the prophecy. On such straws is theology often built. It is doubtful if we can justify even an allegorical interpretation on a MISQUOTATION.

In Matthew 1: 21, the angel strictly commands Joseph: "thou shalt call his name Jesus" whereas the Isaiac prophecy clearly states that "a virgin shall bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." Again it appears either (1) that God was confused or (2) that those whom He inspired to write the gospels were incapable of relaying His word accurately or (3)—to overcome the other two unsatisfactory alternatives—that the Bible is NOT the Word of God.

Perhaps some discerning reader of the First Chapter of Matthew may point out that Joseph may have been confused about the Angel's instructions, inasmuch as these instructions came to him "in a dream" (Matthew 1: 20 ff) and, as we are all well aware, the happenings in a dream are not only generally "confused" but extremely difficult to recall with any exactitude upon waking. This would be a very keen observation, but unfortunately if it were true, then it would follow that perhaps Joseph was confused about other matters in his dream. For if Joseph was confused on one point (viz., the "name" to be given to the child) perhaps he was confused and mistaken about other more important matters in the dream. Perhaps for example the angel did not in fact say that that which was conceived in Mary was "of the Holy Ghost."

At this point we might suggest that (ostensibly to prove Jesus' lofty origin) the unknown author of Matthew first tries to demonstrate by means of the detailed genealogy he offers, that Jesus was descended from David—because it had been "prophesied" or traditionally believed that the Jewish Messiah should come (that is, be descended) from the house of David. Then, to do Jesus greater honor—or so he thought —(though at the cost of consistency) the author of Matthew tries to show that Jesus was not, after all, descended from David the king, but was the very Son of God Himself.

This attempt was very human and understandable, but in an effort to prove too much, the author of Matthew succeeds in proving exactly nothing—except that he is greatly confused or is falsifying the facts. Most assuredly we cannot place the burden of his confusion or deliberate falsification upon God, or upon God's inspiration, because in that case every portion of the Bible would become open to question and liable to doubt.

For it stands to reason that if those whom God inspired were confused or mistaken in one instance, they could be equally confused and mistaken on still other occasions. The true and the false in the Bible record could no longer be distinguished, and chaos would be all that would be left us to conjure with. The Bible would be worthless as a guide to the will of God or religious truth, and susceptible to a multitude of differing interpretations, all of dubious authenticity.

The fact is, that even now we can never ascertain from the Bible record as it stands, whether Jesus was a lineal descendant of David, or the son of God. In some places it is clearly indicated that he was descended from David, while in other places it is as clearly stated he was not. Neither can we determine, with any certainty, whether Jesus was born in the manner that experience has taught us to expect all men to be born, or was born miraculously of a virgin—UNLESS we can uncover evidence more clarifying than the contrary assertions of the author of Matthew.

One thing is sure. The "prophecy" of Isaiah, as we have suggested, did not apply to Jesus, but was intended to relate to a child named "Immanuel" (or "Emmanuel"). Immeasurably more important, however, modern research and scholarship has now verified that the Hebrew word "almah" in Isaiah 7: 14, which was translated by the Greek word "parthenos" (which in Greek signifies "virgin") should not have been so translated, but should instead have been translated by a Greek word meaning merely "a young woman," for this is what the word "almah" signified in the original Hebrew text. The word "almah" in Hebrew does not connote or suggest virginity, and is therefore not accurately rendered by the Greek word "parthenos," which has this virgin connotation.

The whole attempt on the part of Matthew to "confirm" a trumped-up virgin birth on the basis of the mis-translated Isaiac prophecy immediately fails, and carries its own condemnation. Further, it only adds to the conviction that those whom God inspired to indite His Word—if we accept such inspiration as valid—were too vastly confused to be trusted, and theological systems elaborately built upon their misapprehensions are consequently wrong and mistaken. The passage in Isaiah, correctly translated, would read:

> Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a young woman (NOT a "virgin") shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. . . .

This passage, as the reader can readily see, could not refer to Jesus' pretended virgin birth or ANY virgin birth, because the Hebrew text does not mention the word "virgin" to begin with.

The error made by the copyist who translated the book of Isaiah into Greek is now recognized and conceded even by dedicated "Christian" scholars and "Christian" teachers. To corroborate this, I will quote from that excellent statement of the "dogmatics" (the quoted author's own word) of the Christian faith, contained in the work entitled "The Christian Faith" by Claude B. Moss, D.D., who was himself for many years a teacher of young men seeking to be ordained as ministers of the Word. Dr. Moss states the case with perfect candor:

> The Hebrew word in Isaiah does NOT mean a virgin but (denotes) a young woman, married or unmarried. . . .

He is equally frank when he speaks of Isaiah's prophecy:

> Isaiah's "prophecy" (he declares) WAS NOT A PROPHECY OF THE MESSIAH (my caps). . . . It was a prophecy of an Assyrian invasion. . . .

What Dr. Moss and countless other Christian scholars tell us is of course contrary to what the supposedly inspired author of Matthew says:

> Matthew 1: 22 Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of Jesus by the prophet Isaiah, saying: behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son. . . .

By implication, Dr. Moss and the other Christian scholars declare that the "inspired" author of Matthew was seriously mistaken when he insisted that the Isaiac prophecy mentioned in the above passage had reference to Jesus. But how can this be? How is it possible that the author of Matthew, presumably writing his gospel under the undeniably competent inspiration of God, could be guilty of such grave error?

Furthermore, how can orthodox Christian scholars, consistently with their beliefs, challenge Matthew's "inspired" statements, unless of course they are prepared to deny that the Bible is the product of Divine inspiration? Under the circumstances, to refuse to deny the validity of such inspiration would, it seems to me, result in extreme absurdity, to wit: they would apparently hold themselves ready to assert belief in the Divine inspiration of the gospels, yet would not accept the ostensible product of such inspiration. And if these orthodox scholars contended that, despite God's inspiration, the authors of the gospels—because of their human limitations—could be in the wrong, how could they feel warranted to categorically declare that ANY portion of the Bible is the authentic Word of God, whenas it might well be, like Matthew's "testimony" in the above passage, a gross distortion of the truth?

According to the correct translation of Isaiah, the prophecy—if we may call it such—pointed to a perfectly NORMAL birth, but the event recorded in Matthew and in Luke (but strangely and significantly, not mentioned in the earliest gospel, of Mark) was, we are given to understand by the authors of Matthew and Luke, a "virgin" birth. Consequently the Isaiac prophecy (involving as it does only a normal birth) could not in any case allude to the event the gospellists describe.

The reader may perhaps regard the evidence we have already adduced as more than adequate to justify rejection of the Virgin Birth as an actual event; but for the sake of those who may not yet be convinced, we shall persevere and cite additional evidence, which we believe is, if anything, even more compelling than the evidence already advanced. This evidence we shall once again draw from the Bible, so that, if the Bible be indeed God's Word, we Christians would have no choice but to accept this "Divine" testimony as conclusive on the point, inasmuch as it would be preposterous to pretend to worship the God of the Bible and yet reject His testimony.

Before going on to this new evidence, however, it might be well to recapitulate. We have so far demonstrated that both Matthew and Luke have provided evidence of Jesus' normal human generation, in the genealogy each has individually recorded, tracing Jesus' ancestry, through Joseph, to David, and thence back to Abraham. If either genealogical table is correct, the story of the virgin birth of course cannot be true, for it is manifestly impossible for Jesus to have been the supernatural son of God, and at the same time, the "natural" son of Joseph.

In addition to the genealogies, which directly contradict the story of Jesus' divine birth, we have also shown that the prophecy in Isaiah did not in fact prophesy a "virgin" birth, except in an erroneous mistranslation of the original Hebrew, when it was rendered into the Greek language. It is important to understand that the original Isaiah text, had it been translated accurately, would not have said anything about a virgin birth at all, inasmuch as the prophetic text of Isaiah (if we can dignify his utterances by calling them "prophetic") merely prophesied regarding a child to be born by ordinary human generation.

The Hebrew word which Isaiah would have used, if he had intended to speak of a virgin, would probably have been "bethulah," and not "almah." The universal consensus amongst Bible scholars today is that the word "almah" in the Isaiac passage denotes merely a woman of marriageable age, WITHOUT REFERENCE TO HER VIRGINITY.

As we have intimated, the person who undertook to translate the book of Isaiah into Greek was not an exact scholar, and as we have seen, a real-life "Comedy of Errors" ensued. The anonymous author of Matthew comes along, and seizes upon the Greek version of Isaiah, not being familiar with the Hebrew version, and he proceeds to use the Greek "mistranslated" Isaiac prophecy as ostensible evidence to support his story of Jesus' virgin birth, a story which in all likelihood he had borrowed from contemporary pagan writings. These profane pagan writings literally teemed with tales of virgin births and other wonders, and tales of gods, many of whom—it was soberly related—had had sons by human mothers with whom they had become romantically enamoured.

We may here cite as a case in point the numerous sons that Jupiter is said to have fathered by sundry human mothers. One early Christian Father, Justin Martyr (140 A.D.) expressed the matter most vividly in his "Apology," addressed to the Emperor Adrian:

> Apol. 1, Chapter 22: By declaring that the "Logos" (John's name for Jesus), the first begotten of God, our Master Jesus Christ to be born of a virgin, without any human mixture, we (Christians) say no more in this than what you (pagans) say of those whom you style the sons of Jove. For you need not be reminded WHAT A PARCEL OF SONS your writers assign to Jove . . . and . . . as to Jesus' being born of a virgin, you have your Perseus to balance that (it having been anciently related of Perseus that he too was the issue of a virgin birth). . . .

Justin Martyr was endeavoring to show that there was nothing unusual in the Christians' claim that Jesus was the son of a god, and of a virgin as well, as THE SAME THINGS HAD HAPPENED BEFORE, involving pagans and their gods. Imagine using THIS as an argument to defend Christian beliefs, when it is rather a potent argument against believing them! Perhaps of course the argument was well taken as far as the pagan Emperor was concerned, although the Emperor, like ourselves, must have been aware that the stories of Jove and Perseus were pure myths.

At this juncture it might be well to digress, to point out that the fact that the unknown author of Matthew was not familiar with the Hebrew text of Isaiah and knew it only in its mistranslated Greek form, could be used to demonstrate that the author of Matthew was NOT a Jew native to Palestine, and could not therefore have been the Jewish disciple to whom the gospel is attributed—a fact which many Bible scholars have long and seriously suspected. More evidence that the Gospel of Matthew was not written by the disciple Matthew can be found in the gospel itself:

> Matthew 28: 15 So they took the money and did as they were taught: and this saying (that Jesus' disciples came by night and stole his body away while the guards slept) is commonly reported among the Jews UNTIL THIS DAY. . . .

The phrase "until this day" in a context like this indicates that a quite considerable interval of time has intervened between the event chronicled and the recording of it. This is the manner of expression writers naturally use when they refer to events either in the far distant or in the somewhat distant past. When this phraseology is used, we may properly assume that a somewhat prolonged period of time has elapsed since the event described. In the case of the Gospel of Matthew, this assumption is borne out by modern Bible scholarship, which places the composition of this gospel at around 85 A.D.

Still another important bit of evidence, which goes to show that the gospel "according to Matthew" was not in fact written by the disciple Matthew, is really quite elementary, and could be easily overlooked. It seems obvious when we reflect upon the matter, that had the author of Matthew been the disciple indeed, he would not have been reduced to the necessity of copying from Mark's account—and often verbatim—the recital of the events in Jesus' life, but could have written of these events FROM HIS OWN RECOLLECTION.

This is the preposterous twist: the author of Matthew who is supposed to have been Jesus' disciple, and who is supposed to have been an eyewitness to the events, copied the account of the biographical events of Jesus' life given by Mark, WHO NEVER SAW JESUS, and never witnessed the events he wrote about:

> (The author of Mark) gives no sign of having been a personal follower of Jesus. . . . He seems certainly to have been a Christian of the second generation and is said to have been dependent on Peter for his knowledge of the events of Jesus' life. . . .
>
> —*Prof. Ropes, "The Synoptic Gospels"*

Certainly had the author of Matthew actually witnessed the events described by Mark, he would have given his own personal version of them, and at least occasionally added to Mark's account the narration of some events or incidents that Mark must inevitably have missed, in view of the fact that Mark obtained his information at second hand. But the fact is that the author of Matthew follows Mark's chronology almost slavishly, and reports the events for all intents and purposes exactly as Mark reported them.

This complete dependence of Matthew on Mark speaks eloquently. It tells us that the author of Matthew was NOT an eyewitness, and as it turns out, the information he supplies in his gospel he gleaned from another who, ironically enough, was not an eyewitness either. He had his Isaiah at second hand too, for as we have seen, when he wrote of Isaiah's prophecy, he quoted not from the Hebrew version of Isaiah, but from the erroneously translated Greek version.

It seems likely that had the author of Matthew known the book of Isaiah in the original Hebrew, he would not have fallen into the error of using the Isaiac prophecy as a foreshadowing of the purported virgin birth of Jesus. To demonstrate to the reader the extent to which some Christian commentators go to shore up and support their insistent belief in the "inspiration" of the Bible, we might mention that it has been suggested by some that obviously God must have inspired the Greek copyist to translate the prophecy incorrectly, and then inspired the author of Matthew to make use of this erroneous translation. Od's bodkins!

Today in our courts of law where some semblance of justice is attempted and sometimes achieved, we reject anonymous testimony as totally incompetent, yet strangely enough we Christians are apparently willing to receive the testimony of the anonymous author of Matthew, and accept it, anonymous as it most certainly is, as the very Word of God. In this we are surely not only guilty of inconsistency, but what is more, we lay ourselves open to the charge of irreverence: certainly before we accept anything as GOD's Word, the allegation that it is His Word should be investigated in the most thorough manner; any neglect on our part in this respect must be interpreted as a lack of proper veneration for Him.

Putting aside all of the evidence already adduced that tends to confute or deny the historicity or validity of the Virgin Birth, we will now present evidence so unmistakable in its implications as to be virtually conclusive. When this evidence is weighed, even if no other smidgeon of contrary evidence existed, this evidence, standing alone, should be strong enough to successfully challenge the sturdiest orthodox belief in the dogma of the Virgin Birth.

To begin with, if the story of the Virgin Birth were true (that is to say, if the event actually happened), there would be at least two persons who would have had full knowledge of the event, namely, Mary and Joseph. This seems to be almost fatuously self-evident, but it is important for us to keep this simple fact in mind. Furthermore, this FACT is certified and corroborated by the Bible itself, so there can be no question of its truth, inasmuch as it is confirmed by God's unimpeachable testimony—for those who insist that the Bible is His

Word. In Matthew 1: 20, we are told that Joseph was informed of the event by "the angel of God," and in Luke 1: 26-35, we are taught Mary was informed of the event by the angel Gabriel. So the fact that BOTH had knowledge of the event is firmly established in God's ostensible "testimony."

Knowing therefore that their child Jesus was a child divinely conceived of God (if for the sake of argument we accept the story of Jesus' miraculous birth as true), what would be more natural than that they, his parents, should expect certain things of Jesus which would seem strange and incomprehensible in a child born to them in the usual way, and not hedged about with Divinity.

Yet when Jesus as a lad of twelve was found by Joseph and Mary in the temple, holding forth with learned rabbis and doctors of the Law (i.e., the sacred Law), and "astonishing" all that heard him by reason of his "understanding and answers," we are told that Joseph and Mary were AMAZED. Then, when Jesus spoke to his parents and said: "Wist ye not that I must be about MY FATHER'S business?", the author of Luke informs us—writing ostensibly under God's inspiration—that Joseph and Mary did not have the faintest notion what Jesus was talking about!

First let us ask ourselves why his parents—aware as they definitely were of his "divine" nativity—should be "amazed" either (1) at finding Jesus in a temple (what more appropriate place for God's "son," prithee?), or (2) at discovering his wisdom and understanding? THIS was surely to be expected of a "son" of God. THIS was to be normally anticipated for a DIVINE child, whereas it might of course be the cause of some amazement if the child were not "divinely" conceived.

It would be preposterous to believe (1) that Joseph and Mary would be amazed at Jesus' precocious wisdom, considering the circumstances of his birth; or (2) that after being reminded of his divine lineage, they would fail to understand what he was talking about. Let us read the entire Luke passage in question with the above thoughts in mind, and study whether it is even remotely possible that Joseph and Mary had ever heard of Jesus' "virgin" birth by Divine visitation—and keep in mind that if they did not know of it, it could NOT have happened:

> Luke 2: 41-50 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when Jesus was twelve, they went up to Jerusalem . . . and when they had fulfilled the days, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem: and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. . . . But they, supposing him to have

> been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinfolk and acquaintance, and when they found him not, turned back to Jerusalem, seeking him. . . .
> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors (=rabbis), both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers . . . and when they saw him, THEY WERE AMAZED; and his mother said, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? AND THEY UNDERSTOOD NOT THE SAYING WHICH HE SPAKE UNTO THEM. . . .

Before leaving this passage in Luke, we might mention that in the verses immediately following the above quotation, we read:

> Luke 2: 51-52 And Jesus went down with them . . . to Nazareth . . . and Jesus increased in wisdom . . . and in favor with God and man. . . .

The author of Luke, supposedly writing under inspiration, would certainly not have spoken of Jesus in these terms if he had been given to understand that Jesus was God Incarnate or Divine Wisdom in the flesh (viz., the Word made flesh). For when he says "Jesus increased in wisdom," he speaks as one would speak of any HUMAN or mortal being whose wisdom is, by the nature of things, originally immature and subject to consequent growth; whereas, if he was inspired to understand that Jesus was God Incarnate or part of the Godhead (as later claimed by Christian theology) he would have realized that Jesus' wisdom must have been without limit from the beginning and therefore not subject to "increase."

Luke would likewise not have been inspired to say that Jesus increased "in favor with God" as this would merely be saying "Jesus increased in favor with himself," which would be utter nonsense. In short, the author of Luke betrays his own belief in Jesus' humanity by the very words he uses when he speaks of him in this passage, and if, as we have suggested, these words of Luke's were divinely inspired, they reflect God's opinion of Jesus too.

The reader might be interested to know that a tale resembling—in a remarkable way—that told by Luke about the twelve-year old Jesus had been told of the young Buddha centuries before ever Jesus was born. It is related that when Buddha was twelve, he too was "presented at the temple and explained and asked learned questions and excelled all who entered into competition with him."

We are obliged to wonder where Luke obtained his information for this incident in Jesus' youth, inasmuch as this episode is not related by Mark (the earliest gospel), and inasmuch as Luke for the most part copied the events of Jesus' life as related in Mark, following the general sequence of events and chronology Mark supplied. Where did Luke, writing possibly in 85 or 90 A.D., learn of this boyhood incident? Could it possibly be that he heard the story of the twelve-year old Buddha and applied it mistakenly—or deliberately—to Jesus?

Other resemblances between the Bible stories about Jesus and the stories told about Buddha come to mind. As already pointed out in Chapter One, the tale of a Buddhist disciple walking on the water had already been told long centuries before the tale was related of Jesus' disciple Peter. Modern Christian scholars who still accept the Incarnation as a fact, question the authenticity of this Biblical miracle or view it sometimes, not as an historic event, but rather as a "preacher's illustration."

If however it was a preacher's illustration only, it was not a miracle but a myth, because it never happened. The story was then merely invented like any other fable, to point a moral or for the edification of some preacher's congregation, to illustrate the power of faith. It is admittedly an excellent story for a most excellent purpose. It was an excellent and inspiring story when the Buddhist priests first used it to inculcate the power of faith amongst the adherents of Buddhism. But the point is that it should not be represented to us (as it is in the Bible) as an actual event—or as a miraculous event—if it never actually occurred at all.

Besides the Buddhist story of the miracle of walking on the water and the tale of the Buddha being presented in the temple at twelve and displaying precocious wisdom, there are other stories told about Buddha, the features of which so closely resemble the stories told about Jesus in the Bible that we are inevitably led to surmise that the Bible stories might well have been copied from these Buddhist tales.

The Buddhist myth of Buddha's virgin birth is another strong case in point. As you will recall, earlier in this chapter we mentioned how Buddha was said to have been born of the Virgin Maya. It might be well for us to list below a few other tales which were narrated about Buddha and which are well calculated to increase our puzzlement and concern because of their remarkable similarity to tales related ABOUT JESUS in the Gospels:

(1) Buddha as an infant was visited by wise men who recognized in him the attributes of divinity and brought presents of jewels and

other precious substances. All this has a familiar ring. Incidentally, too, there is an ancient Persian tale which relates that the miraculous birth of the divine hero, Mithras, was witnessed only by A FEW SHEPHERDS who came "from afar" WITH GIFTS. Perhaps the detail of the shepherds in the Gospel tale derives from this very ancient story, only now it is the Wise Men, not the shepherds, who come from afar, bearing gifts.

Tracing the Gospel stories or some details of these stories back to their source is as fascinating as trying to puzzle out and piece together the clues in a good detective yarn. In Chapter Three we attempted to trace back some of the better known Old Testament stories, like the story of Eden, the story of the tower of Babel, the story of the Flood, etc. Here we might appropriately mention that the story of Moses' infancy, no less than the story of Jesus' infancy now under discussion, was apparently derived from a legend about a more ancient personality. For the same story that is told about Moses in Exodus 2: 1-10 was anciently told about Sargon: Sargon too was said to have been born of a woman of "lowly" status, and he too, the story goes, was placed in a basket of rushes and set afloat on a river, only to be compassionately rescued and reared to manhood.

(2) Buddha—like Jesus—was "tempted" (by Mara, the Author of Evil.)

(3) Buddha—again like Jesus—was considered a "dangerous" child, and his life was threatened by King Bimbasara, as Jesus' life as a child was purportedly menaced by Herod, a menace which caused his parents to flee with him into Egypt (as it is related in the Gospel).

(4) Buddha, like Jesus, underwent a transfiguration on a mountain. Buddha's transfiguration occurred on a mountain in Ceylon and the story of it tells how a sudden burst of light descended upon Buddha and encircled his head.

(5) Buddha, like Jesus, "ascended" bodily at death to the celestial regions.

(6) Buddha's disciple, Ananda—like Jesus—met a woman of low caste (an "out"-caste), by the name of Matangi, at a well; and, again like Jesus, asked her for water and she too warned Ananda of her low caste and that she should not be suffered to come near him. Compare the Gospel episode related in John:

> John 4: 5-9 Then cometh Jesus to a city of Samaria. . . . Now Jacob's well was there . . . Jesus being wearied sat on the well . . . there cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water and Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. . . . Then saith she unto him,

> how is it that thou, a Jew, askest drink of me, a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. . . .

(7) Buddha is reported to have said to his disciple: "though the heavens were to fall to earth and the great world pass away, though Mount Sumera were to go to pieces and the great ocean be dried up: yet, Ananda, be assured the words of Buddha are true." Compare this statement of Buddha with the purported words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke:

> Luke 21: 32-33 Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. . . .

Besides those listed above, and those previously discussed, there are many other amazing resemblances between tales and sayings reported in the Bible and those in ancient Buddhist writings, like the story of the Buddhist religious ascetic whose eye "offended" him, and—according to the story—he actually plucked it out and cast it away. Compare this with the Matthew verse:

> Matthew 5: 29 (Jesus is speaking) And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. . . .

Indeed, many of the Biblical tales are TOO SIMILAR to the Buddhist stories not to raise the reasonably certain suspicion that they were borrowed bodily by Christian gospel writers.

We do not mention other similarities in the lives of Jesus and Buddha because of their "general" rather than specific similitude; for example, the fact that Buddha's aim was also to establish a religious Kingdom, and that he also had disciples and that these disciples were asked to renounce the world, avow poverty, etc., and such-like matters. We even omit the tale of Buddha wherein it is related that the multitude required a "sign" of him that they might believe. Apparently all religious teachers might be asked for some "signal" proof of the authority of their pronouncements.

Such things, because of their general nature might not indicate any connection between the tales of Buddha and the tales of Jesus, as they might very well grow out of mere coincidence; but the other items listed and discussed involve events, etc. of such identical character that coincidence would have to be ruled out, particularly when not only one such item was involved, but a dozen. The law of probability could hardly bear up under such a burden.

As Jabez Sunderland in his scholarly work, "The Origin and Character of the Bible" remarks: "All this similarity is astonishing." He goes on to relate the historic fact that, curiously enough, when the first Christian missionaries went among the Buddhists, these missionaries too were apparently astonished and unable to account for the similarities except by supposing (as they probably reported to their superiors) that the Devil had been there ahead of them and had planted among the people a mutilated or counterfeit religion resembling Christianity in its main features.

They of course had no way of guessing that early Christianity had probably itself borrowed these features from the more ancient Buddhist religion. This fact was—even then—already long forgotten, or had been deliberately suppressed.

Other similarities to the New Testament gospel stories about Jesus—which are equally remarkable—exist in the tales told about Zoroaster in the "Zend-Avesta" (the ancient sacred book or "Bible" of the Parsees). These similarities are best summarized in Potter's "Story of Religion":

> If a Christian were asked what great religious leader was, according to Scripture, born of a virgin, was saved in infancy from a jealous and powerful foe, confounded wise men by his youthful sagacity, began to preach at the age of thirty, was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness, cast out demons, cured a blind man, performed many other miracles during his ministry and taught there is one Supreme God, he would say at once: "Jesus." But the Parsees would answer "Zoroaster," for this is what the Zend-Avesta (their Bible) teaches about Zoroaster. . . .

Alas, when we contemplate the many points of similarity between the Buddhist and Zoroastrian tales and the gospel stories about Jesus, a great doubt is thrust upon us.

Perhaps after all the Gospel account of Jesus' life is not authentic at all, but consists merely of a re-hash of a number of ancient myths, legends, and wonder tales. The stories remain more or less the same, but the names, scenes, and characters are changed. Instead of Buddha, the teacher's name is Jesus; instead of the mountain in Ceylon, it is a mountain in Judea where the transfiguration of the "god-man" takes place; instead of King Bimbasara, it is Herod who threatens the wonder child's life; and so on.

The reader will remember from our demonstration in Chapter Three that the same kind of changes were wrought in the story of the Flood. In the Babylonian version, it was Utnapishtim who built an ark, in the later Bible version it was a man with a Hebrew name, Noah; instead of the Babylonian god, Ea, it is the Hebrew god, Yahweh who counsels the righteous man to build a vessel in readiness for the flood's onset. It is on Mount Nisir that the ark strands in the Babylonian account, but in the Biblical account it is Ararat. And so on.

So too with the "Eden" stories. In the ancient Chinese version, "four rivers" are said to have flowed from the Garden wherein was located the wondrous tree, but in the Hebrew testament the four rivers become "one river with four heads" (Gen. 2: 10-11); in the Chinese version, one of the four rivers is called a "golden" river, whereas in the Bible, one of the "four heads" is named "Pison," which flows around the land of Havilah, where there is "gold"; and so on. Coincidence? Hardly.

The story pattern in all cases is always the same, but names of new and more familiar geographical places are substituted for the old, unfamiliar, far-off places; new characters replace the old, with local and familiar given and proper names taking the place of foreign names in the old stories. The ancient stories in their alien dress are ever re-apparelled in native Hebrew costume.

By this demonstration we do not wish to be thought to suggest that there never was such a person as Jesus, although some scholars have indeed reached this conclusion. To the writer, nothing seems more certain than that a man whom we today know as "Jesus" was born, and lived and died in ancient Judea. In this I am inclined to agree with the verdict of Jabez T. Sunderland, in his "Origin and Character of the Bible":

> In the Gospel records, there may be and are errors as to fact—legendary accretions, etc. . . . regarding the miraculous voice speaking at the Jordan baptism, etc. . . . they may err: but they can hardly err about the existence of Jesus. . . . There may be ground for question whether this or that utterance purporting to have come from his lips is actually his, or ONLY THE CREATION OF A REPORTER'S MEMORY (my caps), dimmed by the lapse of a third or a half of a century since Jesus spoke. But . . . there can be no reasonable question about the few great simple, central truths which . . . formed the burden of his teaching. . . .

Even if we were to cut away all the Buddhist and Zoroastrian echoes from the Gospels, the personality of Jesus would still, in my opinion, stand forth clearly. Here undoubtedly was an earnest, ethical thinker, his mind filled with Jewish Scripture and the message of the prophets, himself sincerely convinced that NOW at last—in his very generation—the Kingdom of God was "at hand." He saw in contemporary events definite "signs" which had been forecast (as he thought) by the prophets of Israel, signs that pointed to the near approach of the "Great Day of the Lord."

Like the other great prophets of Israel, Jesus thundered against the hypocrisy and pretense he found everywhere evident in religious practice, and in religious doctrine and ritual. This inevitably brought him into conflict with the leaders of the established religion of his day.

Similarly today, any criticism of the Bible or of the doctrines of "orthodox" Christianity or "orthodox" Judaism, however constructive, well-meaning, or justified such criticism may be, might well disturb the church leaders of today, and arouse them to level the charge of blasphemy or atheism against the critic—a charge, by the bye, very similar to that which was levelled against Jesus in his day TIME AND TIME AGAIN. (See Mark 2: 7, etc.) See too Mark 3: 22, where Jesus was accused of being in league with the Devil himself.

Today we realize, or should, that the "blasphemous" criticisms that Jesus directed against traditional and "orthodox" religious practices (including the practice of strictly observing the Sabbath) served as a catalyst in religious and moral thinking, and these so-called blasphemous "ugly ducklings" have evolved into moral and religious values of great validity and beauty. We must confess however that these values are still poisoned or blighted to an often serious degree by the numbing hand of absurd doctrinal traditions that prevent their full fruition and perfect realization.

Besides the Lucan passage cited above (Luke 2: 41-50), there are other passages which demonstrate that Mary and Joseph, who must surely have known of Jesus' "divine" origin if anyone did, betray a lack of such knowledge—a lack of knowledge of the facts and circumstances of his "divine" birth which is at once grossly absurd and insanely incredible, even more incredible too than Peter's "denial" examined in Chapter One. In the Gospel of Luke, we read:

> Luke 2: 25-29 Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon . . . a just and devout man, and it was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that he should not die before he had seen the Lord's "Christ," and he was in the temple when the parents (Joseph and Mary) brought in the child Jesus. . . . Simeon took Jesus up in his arms . . . and said, Lord, now let thy servant die . . . according to thy word. . . .

Then a few verses later, we read:

> Luke 2: 33 And Joseph and Jesus' mother MARVELLED at those things which were spoken of Jesus. . . .

Again, it is we who should marvel at their "marvelling" or amazement. Why should THEY have marvelled or been amazed? If they knew, as we are informed they did know, that the child Jesus was a divine child, the offspring of God, neither Joseph nor Mary should have been surprised at Simeon's words. Yet we are told, in what is presumptively God's own testimony, that they were not only surprised, but astounded at the things that were said about Jesus on this occasion.

Perhaps the most significant and revealing of all passages bearing on the virgin birth, is a passage in Mark where, following close upon the commencement of Jesus' public "ministry," we are told:

> Mark 3: 21 And when his friends (=his kinsfolk) heard of his preaching, they went to lay hold on Jesus; for they said, He is beside himself (=mad). . . .

Jesus' "friends" (in the old sense of kinsfolk), or as we would say today in colloquial parlance, "his people"—a phrase which might easily be intended to include Joseph and Mary—thought that Jesus was out of his mind when he started to preach, whereas Joseph and Mary at least should naturally have expected him to be a religious teacher under the circumstances; that is to say, IF he were God's son.

There is preserved in the Gospel of John, which was written in the early Second Century, a long shadow of the tradition that those closest in kin to Jesus disbelieved in him:

> John 7: 15 For neither did his brethern (=his brothers or close kinfolk) believe in him. . . .

Certainly Joseph and Mary, by their attitude toward Jesus in the presence of his brothers and cousins, and other near relatives, would have conveyed their own acceptance of Jesus' ministry—even if they kept the method of his birth to themselves—so that his "brethren" or those closely akin to him would without fail have sensed this parental indorsement of his dedication or apostleship to God. The occasions would have been frequent when they would have smiled knowingly at Jesus' predilection for things of the spirit, or nodded approvingly at what they would consider his natural bent in this direction, so that his "brethren" could scarcely have been guilty of such thorough disbelief in Jesus as to regard him as demented or bordering on lunacy when he began to preach in public.

Perhaps too the disbelief of his parents and his brethren is reflected in Jesus' own words in the following passage in Mark:

> Mark 3: 31-35 There came then his brethren AND HIS MOTHER and, standing without, sent to him, summoning him.

> And the multitude sat about him and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren outside seek thee: And he answered them saying, Who is my mother and my brethren? And he looked around about on them which sat about him and said: Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. . . .

It is at least doubtful if Jesus would have made such a point of this, if his "mother and brethren" did not disbelieve in his ministry to some extent. It was as much as to say: "Because they believe not in me, I do not consider them truly my mother and my brethren; instead I regard those who believe in the things I believe in, to be my real kin."

Standing alone, this passage admittedly would not be conclusive, but taken with the other passages quoted, it seems to provide strong corroboration; at the least, it may be taken to definitely reflect Jesus' attitude toward his parents and brethren, an attitude which would in turn depend to some degree upon THEIR attitude toward him or his work.

Some of course might argue that perhaps Mary and Joseph were not among the "kinfolk" of Jesus mentioned in Mark 3: 21, who thought him stark raving mad when he set out on his public career of preaching. But before we accord too much weight to this apparently plausible contention, we should ponder Jesus' own words, which tell us plainly that unbelief or lack of honor or respect extended to those IN HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD:

> Mark 6: 4 But Jesus said unto them: a prophet is not without honor except in his own country, and among his own kin, and IN HIS OWN HOUSE. . . .

We are certainly justified to be dumbfounded at any unbelief on the part of Joseph and Mary, and can only account for it rationally by concluding that they did NOT in fact know about Jesus' divinely-impelled virgin birth. Their unaccountable ignorance on this point would favor the further inference that the story of the virgin birth was a tissue of lies invented by the anonymous author of Matthew, or—to view the matter more charitably—a pious fraud on his part. But however pious a fraud it may be, it is nevertheless NOT THE TRUTH; and I submit that no religious doctrine should be based on either a lie, a myth, or a fraud, however "pious."

Because it was prophesied that the Messiah would be a descendant of the house of David, the gospel authors apparently deemed it necessary ALSO to establish that Jesus was descended from David, so that the terms of the prophecy might be fully met. This would account for the two discrepant genealogies which CONTRADICT the miraculous birth of Jesus—for, as we have pointed out, if Jesus was a direct lineal descendant of David, he was not God's "son."

Upon the whole, the probability is great that the genealogies AND the stories of the virgin birth were both without foundation in fact. The reader should however be cautioned to recognize that the method of Jesus' birth is of no real importance in evaluating the validity of his ethical teachings. Jesus' ethical precepts would be just as cogent and valid had Jesus been born an utter outcast and descended from the meanest house of Israel.

By defeating the claim made on Jesus' behalf that he was divinely descended, it would leave the way open to examine his teachings and sayings critically, and leave us free to challenge such as appear obviously unsound. As long as his divine descent were in question, there would be many of us who might otherwise hesitate, feeling that to question or criticize ANY of his utterances would be tantamount to sacrilege.

We should perhaps stress the fact at this juncture that Jesus himself maintained a "critical" attitude toward the established religion and religious precepts and ethics of his day and age, even though they too were embodied or "embalmed" in the Sacred Scriptures or "Bible" of his times. Those who would follow in Jesus' footsteps must not accept even "his" counsels without careful reflection, to judge whether they are founded solidly in the valid soil of moral justice.

A moment ago we spoke of the many Buddhist and Zoroastrian "echoes" in the Gospels, and suggested that, were these "echoes" excised or cut away, Jesus' personality would still stand clear. This goes for his teachings too. Suppose for example, the story of Jesus' temptation were indeed borrowed from the story of Buddha's "temptation" by Mara, the Evil One, and we had therefore to reject the Gospel story of Jesus' "temptation" as inauthentic. What matter? Jesus' moral or ethical teachings would still be as valid as ever.

Suppose too that we had to consider the episode of the Transfiguration unhistoric, or copied from the Buddhist myth. Again, what matter? Jesus' religious teachings would still NOT be essentially impaired. And so with the strange tale of Jesus' virgin birth. We lose nothing of real value in Christianity by rejecting such absurdities and incredulities. In fact, it clears the air AS NOTHING ELSE COULD, to hasten the unification of all faiths under one God.

Let us remind ourselves too that much of the evidence we have already cited, which refutes or denies the Virgin Birth, IS TAKEN FROM THE BIBLE ITSELF. This evidence should then be respected by even those who stoutly maintain, against all comers, that the Bible is God's authentic or inspired Word, because by their own reasoning, the Bible constitutes God's "testimony," and such divine testimony should not be lightly impeached or pushed aside. For the purposes of our demonstration in this chapter, we are accepting such evidence as the Bible provides at face value, and attempting to show thereby that the Bible itself requires that we set the doctrine of the Virgin Birth aside as an undoubted fraud, or forswear it as a myth.

We have still more evidence however, besides that already presented, the implications of which—like Mary and Joseph's impossible ignorance of Jesus' "divine" birth—are so overwhelming that were there any residual doubt still left in any reader's mind at this point, this further evidence, we feel assured, would resolve that doubt.

For it now turns out that we need not have been at such great pains to demonstrate that the purported prophecy of Isaiah did not in fact point to a virgin birth, but seemed to do so only because the Hebrew word "almah" (which did not mean "virgin") was translated erroneously into the Greek word "parthenos," which does specifically denote "virgin." Nor need we have been at such trouble to show that the "prophecy"—if it were such—did not relate to Jesus, but according to its own terms was intended to apply to a child who was to be named Immanuel, whereas Jesus was not so named.

All our pains and trouble to prove the "prophecy" of the Virgin Birth false and mistaken could have been spared us because, by the greatest good fortune, we can demonstrate in the clearest manner that the utterance of Isaiah containing the so-called prophecy of the virgin birth was not a prophecy at all, in the sense in which the word "prophecy" is generally understood when it is used in relation to the Bible: that is to say, an utterance which foretells some future event with the aid of Divine Inspiration, or as a result of God's direct instruction or Revelation.

However, before we can begin this final demonstration, we must understand that the actual truth is difficult to come by when we are dealing with a book as ancient as the Bible, with its many linguistic obscurities, its variant readings, and its spurious accretions. Conclusions can usually be reached only by a diligent study of passages and a comparison of these passages with others, and thoughtful reflection upon not only what these passages say, but what they necessarily imply. For example, one of the authors of Genesis makes the following statement:

> Genesis 14: 14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto the city of Dan. . . .

We can at once infer from this passage (and we owe the development of this inference to Thomas Paine's brilliant analysis) that the book of Genesis could not have been written until many, many years after Moses died, for the simple reason that no such place as the city of Dan existed until centuries after his death. This passage also tells us therefore, that Moses could not have been the "author" of Genesis, as is often pretended.

But where do we obtain the information about the city of Dan, and when it came into existence? As it turns out, the Bible itself supplies this information, in the book of Judges:

> Judges 18: 27-29 And they took the things which Micah had made and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure, and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire. (God's "chosen" were a bloodthirsty lot.) And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon and they had no business with any man and it was in the valley that lieth by Bethrehob. And they built a city and dwelt therein. And they called the name of the city DAN, after Dan their father . . . howbeit (=although) the name of the city was LAISH at first. . . .

It is immediately evident that the writer of Genesis must have lived after the city of Laish had been re-named DAN. In a similar way, we could date an undated document which spoke of the city of "New York" as having been written at a date subsequent to 1664, which was the year when the name of the city was changed from "New Amsterdam" to "New York." We know from the Genesis passage too that the book of Genesis is not of the great antiquity which many of us may have been led to believe or naturally assume, because it is placed first in the Bible.

As a matter of fact, it has now been established by modern Biblical research—a research in which orthodox Jewish and Christian scholars have played an important part—that the book of Genesis was one of the last written of all the books of the Old Testament, rather than the first or earliest:

> At the very beginning of the Bible we find a book called Genesis. Because it stands first and because it purports to give an account of the creation and of the earliest ages of the world, we take

> for granted that it is the earliest Old Testament book. BUT WE ARE MISTAKEN (my caps). It is one of the latest. . . . Near the end of the Old Testament we find books of prophecy called Micah, Hosea and Amos . . . these books were written CENTURIES BEFORE the book of Genesis. . . .
>
> —*Jabez T. Sunderland, Origin and Character of the Bible*

Biblical research can readily establish the approximate date at which the book of Genesis was written by what is called "internal evidence," consisting of statements found throughout the book which could not have been made until a date later than the events related by the writer (or writers) of Genesis. There is nothing mysterious about this method of proof, and we will try to illustrate just how it is done.

As we have already shown, we know from the passage in Genesis 14: 14 quoted above, that the book of Genesis could not have been written until AFTER the name of the city of Laish was changed to Dan, otherwise the writer would not have written that "they pursued him to Dan" but would have written that "they pursued him to Laish." We also know approximately when the city's name was changed because the event is chronicled in Judges 18: 27-29, cited above. As Moses was dead for centuries before this event, we know for certain too that he could not have written the book of Genesis, as we are sometimes taught.

Nor could Moses have written the book of Deuteronomy either, for which he has long been claimed as author because we find in Deuteronomy 34: 5 an account given of Moses' death and burial, which could hardly have been written by Moses. A man simply can not write about his own death and funeral. Some Bibliolators (persons who worship the Bible as if it were an idol), grasping at straws, have advanced the claim that Moses might possibly have been "inspired" to write of his own death and burial beforehand. But the next verse in Deuteronomy tells us differently:

> Deuteronomy 34: 6 But no man knoweth of his (Moses') sepulcher UNTO THIS DAY. . . .

The phrase "unto this day" betrays the fact that this was not written at or before the time the event occurred, but at a much later date—long after the event related—and the phrase "this day" indicates a specific time the writer had in mind, namely the generation or era in which the actual writer lived and wrote. In a similar way we might say today that geologists can detect evidence of the Ice Age glaciers' furthest advance "to this day," indicating by the use of the phrase "to this day" that these glaciers receded a LONG LONG time ago.

Had Moses written of his burial under divine inspiration, he might have written "No man shall ever know the location of MY sepulcher to the end of the world." Even the use of the pronoun "his" in the context strongly indicates another writer, as we do not customarily write about ourselves in the third person.

The important point is that Moses, even under the divinest inspiration, could not possibly have said "to this day" if he had written it BEFORE his burial because this would not make sense. He would be saying in effect that "no one knows where I am buried to the very day I am writing this," and if he were alive, he could not have been buried yet. It would be equivalent to your saying as you read this paragraph: "No one knows where I am buried" while you are still quite active and alive. How could anyone possibly know where you are buried, if you have not been buried yet? What sense would there be to my saying for example, that "no one knows to this day where I ate my final meal on earth" if, as is apparent, the event has not occurred as yet?

Leaving Moses, and returning to Genesis, the passage which speaks of the city of Dan (formerly called Laish) is not the only bit of internal evidence Bible scholars have discovered which corroborates the very late composition of this first book of the Old Testament. In the 36th Chapter of Genesis we find the following:

> Genesis 36: 31 And these are the Kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any King over the children of Israel. . . .

This passage clearly signifies that the book of Genesis was written AFTER at least several Kings had ruled over the Israelites and that Genesis was written by some one who knew about these Kings. In Moses' day there were no Israelite "Kings" and in Moses' day no Kings had ever reigned over Israel.

Again, the verse Genesis 12: 6, relating Abraham's entrance into ancient Palestine, tells us that "the Canaanite was then in the land." This verse had to have been written by someone who lived AFTER the Canaanites were driven or had gone from the land, speaking as it does of a prior time when Abraham lived, when the Canaanites were still in possession of the promised land.

These few examples I hope will serve to show how the books of the Old Testament reveal the approximate date of their own composition and other important facts. We can be altogether certain that the books of Genesis and Deuteronomy for example were both written centuries after Moses' death and were not the extremely ancient revelations many of us think, or have been led to think; in fact, they are far and away less ancient than the Babylonian and Sumerian cuneiform tablets telling of the Flood, etc. described in a previous chapter.

To illustrate briefly one common difficulty encountered in the proper understanding and interpretation of the Bible, we may refer again to the passage quoted a few pages back (Mark 3: 21) where the phrase "his friends" occurs. In this passage the word "friends" does not mean "friends" in the modern sense, but is used in the old English, completely obsolete sense of kinsfolk, kinsmen, or relatives. Consequently, the phrase "his friends" in Mark 3: 21, as we have previously indicated, would be roughly equivalent to the modern colloquial phrase "his people" (meaning "close kinfolk").

A student of Shakespeare would be in a better position to understand the old English into which the Bible was translated in the King James version, inasmuch as many English words have lost their old meanings, whereas in Shakespeare's day these old meanings were still current. For example, Shakespeare employs the very word "friends" referred to above as a synonym for "kinsfolk" in his play, "Two Gentlemen from Verona":

> She is promised (that is, betrothed) by her friends (=her kinfolk)
> unto a gentleman of worth. . . .
>
> —*Act III, Scene* 1, *line* 106.

The young woman spoken of could scarcely have been betrothed by her friends in the modern sense of the word.

Of course, when the Latin Biblical text called for a word signifying "kinsmen," the King James translators chose "friends," never dreaming that its meaning would change so completely, till now the word no longer means "kinfolk" to any but literary antiquarians. This may seem a small matter, but it exemplifies one of the present-day difficulties in comprehending the sometimes more or less obsolete language used in the Bible. Even the phrase "beside himself" in the same Marcan passage, which used to mean "out of his head" or "mad" (lunatic), is no longer currently used to express lunacy per se. Now we use the expression occasionally when we speak of people so emotionally perturbed as to be "temporarily" insane, as when we say a person is beside himself with rage or grief.

In much the same way as we have shown that certain facts can be positively ascertained or deduced from the careful analysis of a given passage or by comparing or collating it with passages in other parts of the Bible, we are able to demonstrate—in a clear and unmistakable way—that Isaiah's so-called prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth could not have been inspired by God at all. We can establish further that this pretended prophecy was a demonstrably false prophecy EVEN BEFORE it was mistranslated into the Greek language, and before it was misquoted or subtly "paraphrased" by the anonymous author of the Gospel of Matthew.

Fortunately, as I have intimated, we need not guess about the matter or advance a conjecture that is "probably" a sound one in the case of Isaiah's prophecy. We can state the matter categorically and provide the most certain and immovable evidence, that the "prophecy" was NOT a prophecy at all, but pure cunning, contrivance, and mumbo-jumbo on the part of Isaiah.

Let us first understand clearly that we Christians cannot logically consider ANY prophecy a valid or authentic prophecy unless it has been inspired by God. This much is self-evident and is the necessary foundation on which belief in and acceptance of all Biblical prophecies must be built, or the word "prophecy" is meaningless.

We must also be willing to acknowledge this further condition as essential to prophecies inspired by God, namely that they must of necessity be TRUE prophecies. We cannot admit that God could even remotely be considered to have inspired a prophecy that WRONGLY foretold the future. To insist that God was the author of or inspired a false, lying, or mistaken prophecy were to slander God egregiously, outrageously. Yet, strangely enough, there are several instances of this kind of fantastic slander in the pages of the Bible.

But let us at least never again be guilty of defaming and vilifying God by dignifying the "prophecy" of Isaiah with God's authorship or inspiration, after we learn that the so-called prophecy of which the purported Virgin Birth was an essential part, did NOT come true, as Isaiah declared that "God" had assured him it would.

In Isaiah 7: 1-16, Isaiah "prophesies" in God's name that Ahaz, King of Judah, would not be overcome by his two arch-enemies, who had combined forces to conquer him, viz., the King of Israel and the King of Syria. Isaiah, in speaking to King Ahaz, pretends to speak FOR GOD. "Thus saith the Lord God" he cries in mock prophetic frenzy:

> Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign (to verify the prophecy): behold a young woman (or, in the mistranslated Greek version, a virgin) shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. . . .

Let us read what actually happened, as it is chronicled in the records of the Kings of Judah, boldly set forth in the Bible:

> 2 Chronicles 28: 5-8 Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him (Ahaz) into the hand of the King of Syria and they smote him and carried away a great multitude of them captives . . . and he was also delivered into the hands of the King of Israel who smote him with a great slaughter. . . . For Pekah (son of Remaliah, King of Israel) slew in Judah 120,000 men in one day . . . and the Israelites carried away captive 200,000 women, sons and daughters, and took away much spoil from them. . . .

As anyone can see with half an eye, the prophecy of Isaiah did not come true, but on the contrary, Ahaz, rather than being victor, was badly beaten, decisively routed: 120,000 of his valiant men were slain, and 200,000 of his women and children were carried away into captivity. Perhaps the numbers are exaggerated by the author of Chronicles, but the fact of defeat is clear. Never again—were he given the chance—would Ahaz trust one who claimed to be a prophet or spokesman of God.

Isaiah LIED. Hear again the preface to his pretended prophecy or revelation: "Thus saith the Lord. . . ." Let us make sure of this: Isaiah not only lied, but lied in the name of God. THIS is taking God's name in vain with a vengeance. But the point that is important for us to remember is that his "prophecy," being false, could NOT be considered "divinely inspired" prophecy in any acceptable sense of the word. Had Ahaz as a matter of fact not been conquered, or had he even successfully withstood his enemies, as Isaiah prophesied, Isaiah would have won for himself great honor with Ahaz as the nonpareil of all prophets and a friend of God.

Isaiah's prophecy, as we have seen, must be regarded as lacking God's inspiration unless we wish to accuse God of lying or using His prophets to utter deliberate deception—which is morally unthinkable. This lack of divine inspiration would naturally vitiate and render invalid EVERY portion of the pretended prophecy. Therefore when Isaiah said God had given him a "sign" to verify his pretended prophetic utterances, he was lying—it was NOT a sign from God nor a sign inspired by God. We cannot accept ANY part of a false and lying prophecy as the revelation of God, and the so-called sign of the virgin birth (the sign of Immanuel)—even if it had not been erroneously translated—was a part of this false prophecy.

What does this mean in terms of the so-called prophecy of the Virgin Birth? First and foremost, the uninspired nature of Isaiah's utterance solidly corroborates—AGAIN—the many other evidences which deny the validity of the story that tells of the miraculous super-natural birth of Jesus. This evidence again confirms that the anonymous writer of Matthew was not inspired by God when he stated that the manner of Jesus' birth "fulfilled" this false and lying Isaiac prophecy.

In the first place, God would certainly have been cognizant that the prophecy was not a genuine one, and could not have been a party to pretending to reveal to the author of Matthew, some generations later, that this wholly false AND mistranslated "prophecy" was a foreshadowing or adumbration of Jesus' birth. For God must have been fully aware of the circumstance that the original Hebrew text of Isaiah made no mention of a virgin, and He therefore could not have inspired the author of Matthew to solemnly declare that it did indeed mention a virgin, just because some inexact scholar had translated the Isaiac passage into the Greek inaccurately.

The many evidences cited previously in this chapter to suggest that the virgin birth was not an actual event (that is to say, that it never took place at all) are only once again confirmed by the fact that the so-called Isaiah prophecy, ostensibly pointing to the miracle of Jesus' birth, was a brazen forgery on the part of Isaiah.

Thus a combination of deliberate falsification on Isaiah's part, an error in translation, the author of Matthew's ignorance of the book of Isaiah in its Hebrew text, the ludicrously impossible circumstance that Joseph and Mary were ignorant of Jesus' divine begetting, and even the stretching of the name Immanuel on the rack of allegory to make the "mistranslated" Isaiac prophecy apply to Jesus, together with the genealogies in Luke and Matthew that pretend to trace Jesus' HUMAN ancestry and lineage, not to mention several occasional references to Jesus as the SON OF JOSEPH, and the CARPENTER'S SON in the gospels (Matt. 13: 55; Luke 2: 27; Luke 4: 22; John 6: 42; etc.), all join hands to inform us, from the Bible record itself, that the story of the Virgin Birth has no basis in truth or reality.

The fact that Jesus constantly refers to himself as the Son of Man —there are some eighty-odd occasions on which he is reported to have referred to himself under this appellation—might be thought by some readers to be pertinent, but probably is not; but the fact that a virgin birth does not follow the law of nature as we know it, and is in conflict with the obvious facts of our own experience too, should, when taken with the evidences culled from the Bible, leave no vestige of doubt in our minds as to where the truth lies.

If further "gospel" evidence were needed, we might point out that, according to John 10: 33-36, even Jesus himself did NOT take the designation "son of God" in any literal or unique sense. In this passage Jesus insists that he is just one of God's children in the same sense that all other Jews are, according to the Word of God as presumably revealed to the Psalmist:

> Psalm 82: 6 I have said, Ye (that is, their judges) are Gods, and ALL OF YOU are children of the Most High. . . .

On the basis of this Scripture which (as Jesus points out) is part of the Jewish sacred Law or Jewish religion, he is not committing blasphemy when he calls himself the "son of God," because that is exactly what all Jews are called BY THEIR OWN SCRIPTURE. And "if" (Jesus argues further) "scripture cannot be broken" (i.e., is infallible), then the designation is not only a proper one, but one suggested and authorized by God Himself. Further, (he goes on to say) he is not including himself within that exclusive group whom the Psalmist calls "Gods," but merely with the more numerous group called "children" of God.

The reader will note that Jesus does not avail himself of the simple and logical defense to the charge that he blasphemed by calling himself the "son of God"; that is to say, he does not claim that he is indeed the literal "son" of God. This defense would have been the most natural and most direct one for him to have used, HAD IT BEEN TRUE:

> John 10: 33-36 The Jews answered Jesus saying, for good works we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. And Jesus answered, is it not written in your Law (see Psalm 82: 6, quoted above) "I said, ye are Gods?" If he (the Psalmist) called them Gods unto whom the word of God came, and (if) the Scripture cannot be broken; how can ye say to me "thou blasphemest" because I said, I am the son of God . . . ?

So again we see that the virgin birth is repudiated, this time by Jesus himself. Certainly a conclusion that is derived from Jesus' own words should be received without reluctance, or any qualms of conscience.

As a final footnote, another striking piece of evidence that the phrase "son of God" was merely intended in a figurative or laudatory sense, can be found by comparing two parallel passages in Mark and Luke:

> Mark 15: 39 When the (Roman) Centurion . . . saw that Jesus (dying on the cross) so cried out (Jesus had just exclaimed,

> "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"), the Centurion said, Truly this was THE SON OF GOD. . . .

When Luke copied the story of the crucifixion into his own gospel many years later, he did not interpret the phrase "the son of God" which he found in Mark's version in any literal sense, but indicated that even then the phrase was understood to be only a figurative or eulogistic expression, signifying "a righteous man," for so he renders it in his account:

> Luke 23: 47 When the Centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was A RIGHTEOUS MAN. . . .

One last word. In the early part of this chapter, we suggested the possibility that the Biblical story of the virgin birth of Jesus was borrowed from the many tales of "virgin" births current in the centuries immediately preceding and following the birth and death of Jesus. In other words, Jesus was not the first man, nor the only man about whom it had been seriously related that he was born ofa virgin and "fathered" by some Celestial Being. The same thing was said of Plato, and Augustus, and many another.

It was an old story that had been told and re-told about dozens of great, wise and pious men to account for their fame, wisdom or outstanding piety. Wisdom and goodness were qualities in ancient times of such rarity that any man who displayed such attributes in an extraordinary degree was suspected of being MORE THAN HUMAN, and in the superstitious mind of antiquity, this suspicion was but a step removed from the belief that such a man must be the offspring of a god.

Perhaps—nay, certainly—virgin births were one of the features in other ancient religions which so closely paralleled the then new Christian religion, which prompted St. Augustine to write:

> The same thing which is now called the Christian Religion existed among the Ancients. They have begun to call Christian the true religion which existed before. . . .

Chapter Five: Forgeries in the Early Gospels

According to what some call the "orthodox" Christian view and doctrine, the four Gospels contain the "good news" or "glad tidings" that God visited the human race on this planet IN PERSON, much as a Sultan, in lowly disguise and masquerade, might mingle with his subjects for an hour or two. The word "gospel," as most of us are aware, literally means "good news," the eminently good tale or tidings of God's visit.

The controlling criterion which seems to determine whether a person is a "Christian," is not belief in the high moral values, or careful observance of the ethical practices taught by Jesus, but rather belief in the gospel of "Incarnation," which signifies the appearance of God on the earth IN THE FLESH. Apparently, even if one were to follow every ethical precept taught by Jesus, he would not be a Christian by this yardstick, unless he also believed firmly in this doctrine of Incarnation.

The theory that God visited this lonely planet is a very engaging one, and if true, would be of truly momentous import for all of us. Any doubts that we might entertain regarding (1) God's existence, (2) God's genuine interest in us, (3) God's goodness, and (4) God's provision for the immortality of our personalities, would vanish at one fell swoop. It would be the be-all and end-all of all our doubts.

Is it any wonder therefore that men of the superstitious and fear-ridden "pagan" world of what we now call the First Century A.D. embraced, with open arms, this new doctrine—this "gospel"—that ostensibly guaranteed everything their mortal and fear-infested hearts could possibly hope and long for? Is it any wonder that Christianity with its Christology and (as we shall presently see) its necessary theory of the Trinity, gained millions of converts and endured so long?

Unfortunately the fact that Christianity "prospered" is not proof per se (=in and of itself) that its doctrines are true, any more than the "prosperity" of Communism in Russia today is proof of the truth of ITS ideology. Many Christian "apologists" (=defenders of the Christian position) have reasoned and still contend that if the Christian religion were not the "true" one, and had not been favored by God's watchful care down the centuries, it could not have grown from such humble beginnings into the restless giant it has now become. They forget that other world religions, whose total worshippers far outnumber Christians, had similarly small and humble beginnings.

Millions basked in the large assurances and promises of the early Christian Fathers, assurances based not so much on the teachings of Jesus, but more upon the theories regarding the "mystical" nature of Jesus. To attain "salvation," one was not obligated necessarily to follow the ethical precepts of Jesus, but one HAD to believe that Jesus was the "Christ," or God Incarnate, or the WORD (=Divine Wisdom) made flesh.

The meaning of the word "Christ" had meanwhile undergone a radical change from its original signification. At first, it denoted simply "Messiah," a Hebrew word which in turn merely meant "the anointed one." When this Hebrew word was translated into the Greek language, it was rendered by the Greek word "christos." Eventually the word "Christos" (or its English equivalent "Christ") came to betoken many things to many people, to wit: the literal Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the Redeemer of Man's Sin, the Second Person of the Trinity, the LOGOS (=the Word made flesh), and even God Himself.

The Christian religion, if it had developed according to the earnest ethical teachings of Jesus, would have taught and promulgated a new WAY OF LIFE. Instead, because the early Christians placed more emphasis on WHO Jesus was and on belief in him, rather than on what he taught, the Christian religion became, in effect, just another WAY OF WORSHIP. As a result, all that Jesus had struggled to achieve on this planet to bring people about him to a realization that religion should be expressed in the conduct of their lives, rather than by observance of rituals or by blindly following so-called "religious" traditions, was nullified and made of none effect. As Jesus told his brethren, the Jews, speaking of the Judaic religion:

> Mark 7: 13 Ye make the Word of God (that is to say, your religion) of none effect through your tradition. . . .

And in like manner, by an irony of fate, the emphasis, early in the development of Christianity, was taken from Jesus' teachings, and placed upon HIS PERSON, making his teachings subordinate to the new "tradition" or doctrine of his mystic "Christhood."

As a result, I think one might venture to say that that person is more Christian in all that the word "Christian" connotes and implies, who follows the ethical precepts of Jesus in his daily life, even if that person worships in a Jewish temple, or a Mohammedan mosque—

more Christian, for example, than another who professes to believe that Jesus was a mystical entity whom the Hebrews called "Messiah" and whom the Greeks called "Christ," or a super-natural Son of God, or a Divine Incarnation, or Saviour, or whatever, but who does not actually or in spirit observe the ethical way of life which Jesus taught.

Belief in Jesus, or belief (as they say) ON his name, is not what Jesus taught. He taught a loving attitude toward God and man, observance of the golden rule, Samaritan-like "neighborliness," a forgiving attitude, and undiscourageable good will with its countless corollaries and adjuncts.

The new way of worship which Paul, and the author of John and the early Christian Fathers (sometimes unconsciously) "created" had, it was found, to somehow provide for a Godhead of more than one, so that it could include Jesus as the fleshly incarnation of God in His supposed visit to our planet, and justify the spreading of the "good news" or gospel, and yet avoid other patent absurdities which would appear. So the Trinity was called into being. In the Authorized version of the Bible, we read:

> 1 John 5: 7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, The Father, the Word (=Jesus), and the Holy Ghost: AND THESE THREE ARE ONE (my caps). . . .

It would appear from this quotation that God's Word clearly confirms and teaches the doctrine of the Trinity.

However, if we take the trouble to investigate the authenticity of this verse, we soon discover that this verse does not, in fact, appear in any of the early manuscripts of the Bible which are still extant from the First, Second, and Third Centuries A.D. It is a verifiable fact that this verse appears FOR THE FIRST TIME in the Fourth Century Latin manuscripts, and was therefore undeniably added to "God's Word" by a Fourth Century Christian, who probably felt that some Heavenly ratification was needed to substantiate the Trinitarian doctrine. Even as late as the Fourth Century A.D., scribes were tampering with what purported to be God's Word.

Now suppose that all manuscripts before the Fourth Century had been lost to us, then those who accept the Bible as God's Word would have been deceived and cozened into thinking that this verse in 1 John 5: 7 was part of the presumably divinely inspired original, whereas the truth is, IT WAS NOT.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not corroborated by this verse because, as indicated above, this verse was added without warrant to the

Bible in the Fourth Century, and did not belong in the Bible, inasmuch as the epistle in which it appears was composed in the first place without this verse. Whether the Bible is received as God's very Word (through supernatural inspiration or direct revelation), or merely as the pennings of uninspired men, this verse has to be considered AN OUT-AND-OUT FORGERY, and is entitled to no honest place in the Bible. It is as though someone in the Eighteenth Century had inserted four new lines in Shakespeare's play, "Hamlet." The fact that they were counterfeit or forged could be readily ascertained by checking this Eighteenth Century version against the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Quarto and Folio editions.

We should perhaps remind ourselves that this forged verse in 1 John has often been cited in the past as God's Word, to "verify" the doctrine of the Trinity. AND THERE IS NO OTHER VERSE IN THE BIBLE WHICH TEACHES OR SUPPORTS THIS STRANGE DOCTRINE.

How then did this doctrine—which is not taught by Jesus either —originally come to be adopted? We may reasonably conjecture that in the earliest times it was realized that some such doctrine as the Trinity had to be employed to account for the "good news" or gospel that GOD had actually visited the earth in person, and yet (and at the same time) did not literally leave His Heavenly residence and walk upon the earth "in person," but in the "person" of Jesus. Even the statement of what it is necessary for us to believe in order to accept the doctrine, has a confused and contradictory sound.

The early Christian Fathers were sure that God was still in "Heaven" because Jesus frequently communicated with Him and addressed Him in prayer. The circumstance that if Jesus were God, his "mind" and his "purposes"—and God's—would be one and the same, and there would therefore be no need for communication between "them" to discuss "their" common mind and purposes, did not seem to these Christian Fathers to be inconsistent, or rather it probably DID seem inconsistent, so that some explanation was called for.

As a result, they seized upon the idea of the Trinity. I say "seized upon" because this notion was not a new one. As a matter of fact, the concept of a triple Godhead was a very familiar one indeed to the pagan world. The idea of a trinity of gods would not and did not therefore seem bizarre to the pagan converts who were to form the majority of the early Christians.

There were many trinitarian groups in the older religions of the pagans; for example, there was the triad of India, comprised of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Incidentally, Vishnu (the second member of the Indian "Tri-Murti"), like the second member of the Christian Trinity, became "incarnate" (=appeared in the flesh), but instead of one only incarnation, Vishnu is reported to have had several successive incarnations—or, as they are called by Brahmans, "avatars." Another ancient Trinity was that of Egypt, consisting of Osiris, Horus, and Isis. Still another ancient trinitarian group of gods was the Babylonian triune, namely Anu, Bel, and Ea. The last-named (Ea) was the god who warned the Babylonian Noah (Utnapishtim) of the impending Flood.

How commonplace the idea of a Divine Trinity was we can surmise, when Jung tells us:

> Triads (=trinities) of gods appear very early, at a primitive level. . . . Archaic triads in the religions of antiquity and the East are TOO NUMEROUS (my caps) to be mentioned. . . . Arrangement (of gods) in triads is an archetype (=pattern) in the history of religion, which IN ALL PROBABILITY (again my caps) formed the basis of the Christian Trinity. . . .
>
> —"*Psychology and Religion*"

Of course, if the idea or doctrine of the Christian Trinity was derived or borrowed from these more ancient pagan concepts of godly trinities, as Jung hints, the Christian Trinity is based not on Revelation, nor even on authentic reality, but on ancient pagan myth, and consequently cannot be credited as the sober truth about God.

As the first few centuries of Christian worship wore on, some serious Christian thinker, feeling no doubt that the idea of a Trinity was after all in many ways an outlandish and fantastical one and one not readily explicable or indeed comprehensible apparently decided to create some substantiation or corroboration for the doctrine that would make explanation or comprehension easier or unnecessary. So this ingenious Christian scribe in the Fourth Century added the verse we know as 1 John 5: 7.

> For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word (=Jesus), and the Holy Ghost: and THESE THREE ARE ONE (my caps). . . .

After these forged verses were inserted—their spuriousness is now firmly established and acknowledged—the only "explanation" of the Trinity a Christian teacher would be called upon to make would be an easy reference to God's Word. He would point out that we are told (or he might say, "God" tells us) in 1 John 5: 7, that a Trinity exists and that the three are ONE; and he might add that we must accept God's Word, and need not try to comprehend it. If Euclid had told us that "three" are "one," the world would have forgotten Euclid long ago, and his system of mathematics would have been discarded as incomprehensible.

Naturally "the faithful" would accept the explanation of the Trinity ostensibly thus substantiated by Holy Writ, without question or qualm, and would dutifully repeat: "I believe in the Holy Trinity. . . ." Credulity is no crime, and no criticism is ever intended in these pages ot those Christians who devoutly believe doctrines that have been dinned in their ears since infancy, and systematically inculcated during their youthful years, and who have had little opportunity to investigate the intrinsic truth of these doctrines for themselves.

Many of us, myself included, having been victims of the same regimen of indoctrination, can readily comprehend that such credulity is not to be imputed to any lack of mental acumen on our part, but is rather to be attributed to our respect for our parents, teachers, and pastors, and our faith in their greater knowledge, and in their honesty, not realizing that they in turn were themselves the honest victims of the same indoctrination as ourselves. It was a case of "the blind (or uninformed) leading the blind."

It is a matter of historic fact that, at the beginning, it was often a capital offense NOT to believe in the Trinity, and failure to profess belief in the Trinity frequently led to torture, exile or death. Even in those far-off days it was hard for some to swallow the idea of a hydra-headed God, or an Entity of Three Gods which somehow was only ONE God, but yet somehow THREE too, and many preferred torture, exile or death rather than openly acknowledge belief in such a Trinity. Our heart goes out to those stout souls who could not cynically profess to believe what they did not in fact believe, feeling in their honest probity that such a profession would taint the integrity of their souls.

Profession of belief was actually all that was required, not—be it noted—not "belief" itself. The cleverer sort might confess to the belief, to avoid the rack, and shake their heads at their simpler neighbors who did not have the imagination (or were incapable of the necessary insincerity or hypocrisy) to glibly profess what they could not inly believe, and went to their deaths in the fiendish torture chambers of early Christian administrators—for the early Christians soon learned that it was easier to FORCE belief than win it by fair and honorable means.

The Latin texts of the Fourth Century containing the interpolated or spurious verses regarding the Trinity were, as a matter of course, copied and re-copied for centuries afterwards, and finally translated into German, English, etc. Ultimately however, modern Biblical research made it quite clear that the earlier texts from which the Latin 4th Century texts were themselves originally copied, had NOT contained these verses. This established conclusively that these verses were added or interpolated in the Fourth Century. If all the early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament had disappeared in the meanwhile, and the only text we had was the Latin one, who could then have detected the forgery?

I have gone into this instance of forgery and unwarranted textual alteration at some length to illustrate by one example (and there are many others in the gospels) how it is possible for such forgeries to have contributed to the establishment of "articles of faith" or doctrines in Christian theology, which had no basis in revelation—if we consider the Bible as such—nor any basis in fact. We certainly cannot concede that a myth could give "historic" foundation to a doctrine, nor can we admit that a forged addition is sacred truth, even when such myths or forgeries occur in a book that actually is, or masquerades as the Word of God.

To perceive the seriousness of the situation, suppose for instance that most of the Gospel of Mark was similarly forged or based on myths. Indeed, how can we check the sources of Mark's information at this date, when these sources no longer exist? If we had the original texts or transcripts of the oral reports from which he copied—and he had perforce to copy from some source, writing as he did around 65 A.D., and not having himself been an eyewitness to the events which he describes—if, as I say, we had Mark's original sources we would be in a position to verify whether he copied or transcribed these originals accurately, and determine where he added and what he added, or omitted, in his version. But the originals are no longer extant; they are gone with the wind; and we have no way of checking the authentic content of his text.

The fact that texts were altered in later times, for example in the Fourth Century, immediately suggests that possibly even greater forgeries were perpetrated in EARLIER centuries. Somewhat to corroborate this very possibility, we may adduce the now established FACT that the last eleven verses in the last chapter of Mark were indeed so forged and added to the Gospel of Mark.

These eleven verses do not appear in ANY of the very earliest manuscripts of the New Testament, but appear for the first time in the gospel of Mark in the middle of the Second Century A.D. Here again, had all earlier copies of Mark disappeared, we would be helpless to do aught but accept these last eleven verses as a genuine and authentic part of Mark's original composition, WHICH THEY ARE NOT. Were we entirely unaware of the surreptitious nature of these last eleven verses, and if we received the Gospel of Mark as "divinely inspired," we would no doubt believe that these fraudulent verses were also a portion of God's "revelation."

As it is, these eleven FORGED verses in Mark are still taken by the majority of Christians as God's "testimony," and are frequently used to "corroborate" three appearances of Jesus after his purported resurrection, and other matters. The circumstance that these verses were forged does not prove that the resurrection of Jesus did not occur —we have no way of knowing—but obviously, if we wish to be thoroughly honest with ourselves, we cannot quote these bogus verses to establish that Jesus' resurrection did take place, any more than we can use the verses in 1 John 5: 7 to verify the validity of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Besides, if these verses telling of Jesus' appearances after his crucifixion and death were forged in the book of Mark, which is the earliest biographical account of the life of Jesus, does it not at once suggest the possibility that the later biographical accounts of such post-resurrection "appearances," reported in Matthew and Luke, were likewise forged? If the earliest biographer (Mark) provided no GENUINE evidence of Jesus' appearance after death, we might be forgiven for wondering from what hidden source the later biographers procured such evidence.

If such evidence did not exist 35 or 40 long years after Jesus' death, when Mark wrote his gospel—and had such data existed, he must surely have recorded it, inasmuch as he carefully records "evidence" of every other possible wonder relating to Jesus—from what source was it obtained by Matthew and Luke in 85 or 90 A.D. when they composed their gospels? One important thing to bear in mind too is that both Matthew and Luke relied (and apparently had to rely) almost entirely on Mark for their biographical details, in relating the events in the life of Jesus, neither one having been himself an eyewitness to the events he chronicled. In most instances, Matthew and Luke copied Mark's description of events and followed his chronology of these events, sometimes word for word, and as it were punctuation mark for punctuation mark, slavishly recording the events as reported by Mark who, as we will recall, was not himself an eyewitness either.

If then the book of Mark provides no evidence (except the forged evidence cited above) of Jesus' appearances after a purported resurrection, just where did Matthew and Luke get their "new" evidence? Certainly, under the circumstances, the presumption that their evidence is counterfeit is a strong one.

For closer examination, I append below the eleven verses we now know for certain did not belong to Mark's original gospel, and I should probably add that even orthodox Christian scholars (except those bound by vow) now freely acknowledge the fact that these eleven verses are fraudulent. Let us keep in mind, as we read, that EVERY WORD of the following extract taken from the gospel of Mark is forged:

> Mark 16: 9-20 When Jesus was RISEN (here we are given forged testimony of Jesus' resurrection) . . . he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. . . . She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned. . . . They, when they heard that he was alive, believed not. . . . After that he appeared (the second spurious report of Jesus' "appearance") in another form unto two of them as they walked into the country . . . and these two went and told the rest and they did not believe them either. . . . Afterward he appeared (a third piece of forged evidence that Jesus appeared alive after death) unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and he upbraided them with their unbelief because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen . . . (remember that every single word of this is forged). . . . And Jesus said, go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (this exhortation or "commission" to his disciples, to preach the gospel to the whole world is PART AND PARCEL of the total forgery). . . . Jesus saith, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not is damned (the very doctrine that baptism is essential to salvation is also included in these eleven spurious or forged verses). . . . Jesus continues, And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils (possession of this power by the faithful was a common belief, but we see that here it is an integral part of this forged addition to Mark) . . . they shall speak with new tongues (more forged testimony, this time that "believers" will be miraculously able to speak other languages than their own, without study). . . . So, after the Lord had spoken unto them, HE WAS RECEIVED UP INTO HEAVEN (we see that even the doctrine of Jesus' "Ascension" is fictitiously corroborated by these forged verses too) . . . and sat on the right hand of God. . . .

But now we must not suppose that the last eleven verses of the Gospel of Mark are the only forgery known or suspected in the New Testament. Many students of the Bible who provisionally accept most of Mark (except for example the eleven verses mentioned above) as having at least SOME historical or biographical authenticity, have reached the conclusion that the Gospel of John must be regarded as inauthentic, at least in some parts, because of the irreconcilable differences between it and the other three gospel accounts.

As a matter of fact, we ourselves shall attempt to demonstrate in the next chapter that the Gospel of John, so-called, should be rejected possibly IN ITS ENTIRETY as a fictitious or forged document, and should definitely be denied equal status with the other gospels. We shall examine, for the reader's consideration and judgment, the circumstances that have suggested and, as we believe, overwhelmingly warrant this conclusion.

The complete authenticity of even the book of Mark is an open question, because we have still to satisfy ourselves as to whether (1) the text of Mark, as we have it now, is a narration of actual historic events based on trustworthy traditions, passed on by word of mouth from eyewitnesses, or preserved in earlier written memoranda of the events, OR (2) whether the book of Mark was, for the most part, a cooperative "creation" of the first two or three generations of Christians to 65 or 70 A.D.

I use the word "creation" rather than forgery in connection with Mark, because it is my feeling that many Christian theological ideas like those of the Christhood and Divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, etc., evolved gradually and more or less undeliberately from earlier pagan and Jewish notions. In other words, these doctrinal ideas resulted from the thought patterns of the First Century A.D. rather than from deliberate attempts at deception on the part of the early Christian apostles and "clergy." If there was any deception, possibly it was largely self-deception, deriving from wishful thinking.

However, this is not to say that some of the early Christian Fathers may not have deliberately contributed to the propagation of ideas which they themselves knew or at least suspected were not true. That most famous of all historians, Edward Gibbon, emphatically confirms this possibility of deliberate deception (the parenthetical remarks and caps in the following quotation are mine):

> The gravest of ecclesiastical historians, Eusebius (himself qualifying as a "Christian Father"), indirectly confesses that he has related what might redound to the glory of religion and that he has SUPPRESSED all that could tend to the disgrace of religion (that is, the Christian religion). Such an acknowledgement will naturally excite a suspicion that a writer who has so openly violated one of the fundamental laws of history (viz., the moral obligation to report the truth, i.e., ALL the facts) has not paid

> a very strict regard to the observance of the other (that is, the moral duty to avoid inventing facts). . . .
>
> —*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. II.*

In short, as I take it, Gibbon tells us that one who would suppress facts that might throw doubt on Christian doctrines may be readily suspected of forging or making up facts where such facts are lacking, to support such doctrines (forged "factual" support of the kind we have seen was used to bolster the doctrine of the Trinity in 1 John). Suppression of facts—where known—is on a moral par with deliberate invention of false facts: both practices tend to deceive, both are equally immoral, both are equally reprehensible, and both, where God is involved, constitute a crime against truth of the greatest magnitude.

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch after 69 A.D., was long ago detected as the forger of several now discredited "epistles." Paul too in his letter to the Romans seems to intimate that he considered a lie justifiable, if it contributed (rather let us say, if the perpetrator of the lie thought it contributed) to the "glory" of God:

> Romans 3: 7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded THROUGH MY LIE unto His glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner . . . ?

Lactantius, a Christian writer of the Fourth Century A.D., reminds us:

> Among those who seek power and gain from their religion, there will never be lacking an inclination to FORGE AND LIE for it. . . .

And Gregory of Nazianzus, writing to St. Jerome, says:

> A little jargon is all that is necessary to impose on the people. The less they comprehend, the more they admire. Our forefathers and learned men have often said NOT WHAT THEY THOUGHT (my caps), but what circumstances or necessity dictated. . . .

Even St. Augustine, called by some the greatest of Christian Fathers, and certainly the most renowned, felt no compunction in telling an out-and-out lie. In his Thirty-Third Sermon, St. Augustine asserts:

> I was Bishop of Hippo when I went into Ethiopia to preach. . . . In this country we saw men and women without heads, who had two great eyes in their breasts. . . .

This same man, one of the most articulate of the early Christian Bishops, tells us elsewhere that he PERSONALLY witnessed the resurrection of the dead on SEVERAL occasions. If he could lie with such aplomb about the headless "anthropophagi" (the word Shakespeare uses to describe such mythic creatures in Othello, Act I, Scene 3, line 144), would he hesitate, think you, to tell a deliberate lie regarding having witnessed the resurrection of the dead, which would redound—as he supposed—unto the glory of God?

I put the question: can a deliberate lie EVER redound to the "glory" of God? Any lies or untruths, for example, that the author of Matthew, the author of John, St. Augustine, Eusebius, and men of their ilk may have forged or repeated, did not and do not, I am sure, help the cause of truth, nor do they help the cause of religion or advance our understanding of God.

Scoundrels who tell a "pious" lie doubtless think it a noble exploit —nay, a capital act of honor—to lend Heaven a hand with their own officious "inventions" and lies, so that some "heavenly" doctrine (as they conceive it) might be "corroborated" and be accepted by the public at large. De Casaubon, the ecclesiastical scholar, reminds us that those who lied in this way were wont to deprecate or throw a cloak over the wickedness of their action, by declaring that they saw no wrong in such inventions, inasmuch as they were "devised for a good end."

On the whole, the Gospel of Mark is probably a mixture of fact and fiction, or a conglomerate fabric made up of some threads of authentic tradition (how trustworthy we may never know, save in some possible after-state), interwoven with an enormous amount of pagan "religious" and quasi-religious ideas, ideas which in turn were themselves based in many instances on tales borrowed from ancient mythologies and from ancient pagan "sacred" documents.

The very air of the pagan world of the First Century was laden, as we pointed out in a previous chapter, with tales of the virgin births of many wise and pious men who, it was said—by way of high compliment—were "divinely" begotten. The atmosphere was equally crammed with stories of miraculous healings brought about by exorcism of unclean spirits, possession by whom (or by which), it was generally believed in those days, made a man lunatic or subjected him to sundry bodily infirmities. And astounding miracles of diverse kinds, like the parting of rivers for dry-shod crossings (the story of Exodus is not the only instance of this), and walking on the water, etc., were rife.

In such a climate, Christianity was born, and what would be more natural than for the new religion, as it spread, to adopt many of the pagan ideas and give them a new "Christian" adaptation or interpretation? We all know today that Christmas, like many another "Christian" festival, was originally a pagan holiday, and that many of the customs, justly dear to our hearts and closely associated with Christmas, were in their origin pagan or heathen practices, like the custom of putting up a "Christmas" tree indoors, decked with mock fruit.

Can anyone imagine that the early Christians could adopt pagan holidays and pagan practices and at the same time avoid adopting pagan ideas as well? Even the notion of Jesus viewed as a sacred sacrifice (i.e., THE sacrificial lamb) is primarily a pagan concept, as is the idea of being "washed in the blood" (viz., in the blood of an animal butchered on a pagan altar). Long before Jesus appeared on the scene, pagans were accustomed to the sacrifice of animals to "propitiate" their gods.

He was a genius indeed who first fastened on this thoroughly pagan sacrificial-propitiation idea to explain WHY Jesus had died, despite the fact that he was ostensibly and divinely immortal. It was pagan self-immolation or self-sacrifice, a type of suicidal sacrifice which was sometimes practised amongst pagans, in desperate situations, to appease a pagan god or to win his favor. There are instances of this even in the Old Testament, in the early days of Judaism when it too was purely a "pagan" religion, a worship of many gods.

For a time after Jesus died, his followers were confused, if not positively non-plussed, at a complete loss to understand why Jesus had died. His followers at first had no rational or remotely satisfactory explanation to account for his death and his apparent "defeat" by the powers of the world. How could Jesus, if he were truly God's Messiah, God's Anointed One, meet defeat?

Until this question was answered and until this defeat could be explained away, there would be little hope for the success of his followers in spreading his "doctrine" and trumpeting his name. If he were the Messiah and God's "appointed," the Gates of Hell could not have prevailed against him. Yet a mere handful of men (a few priests and a few Roman soldiers) had brought him low. How, how could this be?

A well-entrenched pagan idea was near at hand which offered not a rational answer perhaps, but at least a plausible explanation. If Jesus' death were to be viewed in the light of a sacrifice (a suicidal act of self-immolation) to "propitiate" God, the WHY of Jesus' death would be on the way to solution. There would be nothing strange about such a notion to the pagan mind, for this sort of sacrifice was an accepted thing in pagan worship and pagan experience.

Why not then use this idea to solve the mystery of Jesus' ignominious death? As I said above, he was a genius who fastened on this idea to explain Jesus' death, and the idea had besides great "selling" power amongst pagans. The pagan mind could not have easily grasped a spiritualized religion based on inward motivation, such as Jesus offered, but a blood sacrifice would be quite another thing, altogether comprehensible to the heathen mind.

Jesus—his early followers may then have reasoned (after accepting the erroneous premise of his self-immolation)—Jesus must have surely allowed himself to be crucified. The gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke deny this inasmuch as they tell us that Jesus was seized forcibly. But by the Second Century, when the forged book of John was written, the idea—the pagan idea—of VOLUNTARY self-immolation had firmly taken root and crystallized:

> John 10: 18 (In this verse Jesus is purportedly speaking) No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down myself. . . .

Not otherwise, they probably reasoned, could he have met "death" at men's hands, being God's "Messiah" (as Mark relates) or God's own son born of a human mother (as the authors of Matthew and Luke later on attempted to establish). There were of course many such putative "sons" of human mothers conceived by gods in pagan lore. Still later, Jesus was to be regarded not only as God's son, but in some sense as God Himself in the familiar act of pagan self-destruction.

Now, having hit upon the idea that Jesus' death was an act of propitiation or atonement, the early Christians had to find something sufficiently plausible for which God would require propitiation or for which atonement might be appropriate. As we know, they seized upon Adam and Eve's disobedience in the naive story of Eden related in Genesis.

God had (shall we say) been displeased with the race of men since Eden, but had planned all the time to take them back into His good graces after they had tortured and killed His "only" son, "sent" a-purpose to be slain by them. Reason, thou art fled to brutish beasts!

To the early Christians at least, the pieces seemed to fit, or were gerrymandered to fit, although it was passing strange that Jesus—if he had come for this atoning purpose—never once mentioned Adam and Eve's disobedience in his recorded preaching. Strange indeed. It was truly a strange, grotesque, and puzzling theory, this atonement, but the men and women of long ago took to fantastic ideas, and seemingly, the more fantastic an idea was, the more it took hold and prospered.

We have already demonstrated in an earlier chapter that the story of Adam and Eve was apparently derived from a very old myth, and therefore the disobedience claimed as the reason for God's anger or for the estrangement of His grace from man, never actually occurred, except in fancy or fiction. Such a fictional disobedience could hardly serve as a realistic basis for the straight "orthodox" claim that there was indeed a real need for Jesus' incarnation and his "atoning" death.

Further, the very idea that God would send his son to be ignominiously executed at the hands of men to atone for their supposed "sin" (assuming for the moment that the disobedience was not a fictional event but a real one) was a revolting and absurd notion. Again, the basic premise that God could hold any man responsible for another man's misdeed must be considered a wicked and immoral slander against God.

The Christian theory of man's fall and redemption is simply told. It seems that there was a fallen Angel, later known as Satan, whom God (though all-powerful) was unable—or unwilling—to entirely destroy. God was however able to cast this Evil Angel from Heaven, but not quite strong enough to confine him to the Pit of Hell—or again, perhaps unwilling to do so. Anyway, Satan was not prevented from entering the garden of Eden in the shape of an apparently walking, talking, and reasoning "serpent" (if you can conceive this), to persuade Eve to eat an apple, a very special apple.

All this, Christian theologians tell us, God permitted or did not wish to prevent, so that He could first condemn all mankind, in order that he might afterwards "prove" His great love and infinite mercy toward men by later begetting a son (who, it seems, already existed however) whom He would send down to earth on purpose to be murdered by this same race of men.

Unbelievably, because of this greater sin against Him (that is, the murder of His only son) He would forgive mankind for their lesser misdeed, consisting of disobediently eating an apple. This were as though we should sentence a man to death because he stole a loaf of bread, but would reverse this sentence and release him from the consequences of his theft because he murdered the baker or the baker's son.

There is even some question whether the act of Adam and Eve could be put in the category of a "wrongful" act in the first place, because actually, until they ate of the apple, we are given to understand, they could not distinguish between right and wrong, or good and evil. They first gained this "knowledge" by eating of the forbidden fruit. Would it seem just on God's part to condemn the tiger in whom He had implanted no moral sense (no sense of what is right and what is wrong) for killing his lesser prey? If the suppositious man who stole the loaf of bread were an idiot incapable of apprehending whether his act were wrongful, would we—as fair-minded individuals—charge him with guilt in the first place?

Again, how strange that Eve was not at all surprised at the serpent's ability to speak, nor at his reasoning power! Had God given her no discernment? If this story of man's fall and redemption were not offered to us as "sacred" truth, and solemnly inculcated from our youth as such, it is difficult to imagine a story that would excite more ridicule because of its absurdity, or a story that would arouse more moral condemnation because of the unlovely picture of God it portrays. We see God in this story in a morally degrading light at almost every turn. We can the better understand Thomas Paine's judgment:

> It is impossible to conceive a story more derogatory to the Almighty, more inconsistent with His wisdom, and more contradictory to His power than this is. . . .
>
> —"*Age of Reason*"

In addition, we have attempted to demonstrate in our chapter on the Virgin Birth, that there seems to be little doubt that the authors of the intermediate gospels (Matthew and Luke) were not in fact relating an actual event when they described the miraculous or divine virgin birth of Jesus, but were merely narrating a myth they had borrowed from the pagan literature and pagan traditions current in their day and age. It of course follows that if these gospel writers were not adhering closely to historic truth in the case of the one event (the manner of Jesus' birth), it increases the probability that they may have been guilty of aberration or wandering from the meticulous narration of actual events in still other instances.

They were not perhaps, to their way of thinking, falsifying or uttering deliberate falsehoods. The ancient mind, except for rare instances, or during lucid intervals, was a place (if we may so describe it), wherein the facts of experience, innumerable half-truths and, as we would say, "old wives' tales," mingled in vague confusion with a great multitude of myths and superstitions, so that people themselves could scarcely be certain what they believed and what they did not believe, and could but with difficulty distinguish what was "true" and what was not.

Their minds were, in a manner of speaking, smothered in a haze of surmise "where nothing is but what is not," to paraphrase words from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Often enough, when they repeated even exorbitantly fantastic tales, they somehow believed them to be substantially true, or were incapable of discerning their status as truth or no, as when St. Augustine gravely reported that he saw headless men and women with great eyes in their breasts.

But the cold, unvarnished fact remains that these early Christian writers were relating events which, objectively considered, had never happened, and passing them off as though they were true and historic events, and future generations were inveigled into accepting them as such, as for example many events recorded in the Gospel of John. I have already intimated that in our next chapter, we will attempt to demonstrate why the book of John must be regarded as a forged document from end to end, for in this "fourth" gospel the author of John tries valiantly and premeditatedly to provide a spurious or forged "scriptural" basis for the Christian doctrines "about" Jesus which had only just evolved in the Second Century.

It was at this point, or earlier, that Christianity turned aside, and instead of coming down to us as the religion OF Jesus, became the religion ABOUT Jesus. And the religion "of" Jesus embodied in his purely ethical teachings, and the religion "about" Jesus, bound up with innumerable dogmas about Jesus' divine or semi-divine nature, and the purpose of his "coming," are worlds apart, and it is an utter impossibility that the two should meet on any common ground.

Many forged additions in the three earlier gospels, other than those already mentioned, have been detected by dedicated Bible research students, which makes it a virtual certainty that even the oldest manuscript copies we now possess of the New Testament were themselves not accurately copied from the earlier or more ancient texts.

Research has now definitely and strongly corroborated the "habit" of Christian copyists to change the text more or less at will, and their penchant to add something new to the text, sometimes to provide evidence to support some favorite theory or doctrine of their own, or to answer by forged testimony (of supposed eyewitnesses) the questions raised by some controversy—raging when they were presently engaged in the arduous task of copying some Biblical text by hand—over the claims or doctrines being propagated by the then "new" Christian Church.

It stands to reason that if additions to the text were being made by copyists and scribes in the Second, Third, and even Fourth Centuries A.D., that additions had been made, and perhaps on a much larger scale, during the First Century A.D. The only reason we cannot ferret out these older forged "additions" and interpolations is that we no longer have—and probably will never be able to find—the manuscripts (the hand-written manuscripts) from which the very oldest copies we do possess were transcribed.

If we had the Hebrew originals, or even the first Greek translations of these Hebrew originals, we would be in a position to compare them with the oldest manuscripts we do have, and readily discover all the forged additions made by subsequent copyists, just as we can now detect the unauthorized additions made by copyists in the Second, Third, and Fourth Centuries by comparing these later altered texts with the relatively "purer" texts of the First Century manuscripts from which the later manuscripts were themselves copied. These earlier manuscripts were preserved for us by happy chance—or if you will, by God's providence—so that we who arrive on the earthly scene in after centuries might not be entirely deceived as to their authenticity.

I need not point out to the reader that if these few (and they are very few) earlier manuscripts, that have survived the ravages of time and man's spiteful destructiveness, had been lost or destroyed, we would have no way of knowing that the last eleven verses of the Gospel of Mark (telling of Jesus' three resurrection appearances, his purported ascension, the doctrine of baptism, etc.) were absolute forgeries, nor would we know that the verses in 1 John, corroborating the doctrine of the Trinity were likewise forged, nor would we be aware that the words attributed to the dying Jesus in Luke 22: 34, where he is represented as saying, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," are also a fraudulent addition to the text.

None of the specified verses are to be found in the earlier manuscripts of the gospels, and there can therefore be no question that they do NOT legitimately belong in the Bible, whether it be God's Word or man's composition. The serious aspect about all this is that we would not know that these passages were fraudulent if we did not have in our possession the parsimoniously few earlier First Century texts for comparison. We would accept WITHOUT QUESTION the words attributed to Jesus in these passages in Mark and Luke, as genuine utterances of Jesus—as many of us still do, because the FACT that they are really forged additions is not given what might be termed "total" publicity by research scholars, many of whom are "committed" to upholding the tenets of orthodox Christian theology.

These orthodox scholars do not deny the fact of forgery, but neither do they trumpet it from the roof-tops. They perhaps fear, not so much that orthodox doctrinology will be confuted, but that "our" mental picture of Jesus would be irretrievably mutilated by the exposure of these forgeries, and perhaps they fear too that their disclosure of these frauds might make the man in the street question ALL utterances ascribed to Jesus, as well it might.

According to Mark, which was written about 65 A.D. or possibly a little later, but which is still the earliest gospel, the words Jesus actually said, as he hung dying on the cross, were:

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me . . . ? (NOT the forged words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.")

As we have pointed out in Chapter One, these words in Mark are words that ring of disappointed expectation, and unbelieving despair; they are not the words of a Divine "person" or being who has come willingly and on purpose to carry through a plan of "atonement."

Jesus' firmly fixed idea that he was indeed the long-awaited and long looked-for Jewish Messiah, and the Scriptural Son of Man, whose coming was supposedly foretold in Daniel's vision, the "Anointed One" who was chosen to usher in the Kingdom, was a MISTAKEN idea, but that Jesus was honestly convinced of its truth seems apparent from the earnest words of unbelieving despair he gave vent to on the cross, which Mark faithfully records.

Later on, the dying words reported by Mark no doubt appeared puzzling to the faithful, in the light of the new doctrine of the Incarnation and its companion doctrine of Redemption, or Atonement, which the Church leaders had begun to teach to explain WHY Jesus had died in such a humiliating manner. As we have previously indicated, the big question in the earliest hours of Christianity after Jesus' death hinged on why he, the Messiah—if he was the Messiah—had allowed himself to be so shamefully treated, or why God had permitted this. Subsequently, the big question was to revolve upon why he had not returned "immediately" AS HE HAD SAID HE WOULD. New doctrines, new theological theories, new dogmas regarding Jesus had to be hastily shaped, invented and if need be, forged by the leaders of the early Christian community, to overcome the rising doubts amongst the lay Christian groups, and to satisfy the unsatisfied among the early clergy.

To demonstrate to the lay Christian that Jesus was not just a poor deluded visionary, new dying words (it was thought) had to be put into his mouth and the old ones shoved aside or regarded as inscrutable. Now therefore some Christian scribe, while he was re-copying the Gospel of Luke, added new words to the text, and instead of Mark's anguished cry of despair, we now find the calm and patient, almost god-like petition:

> Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. . . .

This pronouncement, this thrice noble utterance was clearly more in keeping with the new semi-divine mantle the Church leaders had decided to place on Jesus' shoulders to explain his death in terms of the new equation of atonement. These new words were more in conformity with the divine role Jesus was purportedly playing, and in which he was now cast, and accorded well with the already established Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement.

But it is our duty to report that Jesus NEVER actually uttered these noble words. These patient words do NOT appear in any of the earlier or oldest manuscripts of Luke, from which the later ones had to be copied. All Bible scholars WITHOUT EXCEPTION are now aware that these words were not written by Luke, nor therefore could they have been spoken by Jesus. This nobly conceived utterance was a forged addition inserted by a later copyist, to win greater belief in the legend of Jesus as the God-man.

The copyist correctly reasoned that THIS was the way Jesus should or would have spoken had he been God, or one Person of the God-Trinity. Very probably the anonymous Christian who invented these words and interpolated them into the text of Luke's gospel, felt a warm justification in representing Jesus as uttering them.

If written in fictional literature, such words could well be regarded as a stroke of genius, because the words fit the "character" so felicitously. We poor unliterary folk cannot conceive how the copyist could even have hit upon them. But, forgetting our eulogy of the forger's conception, the truth is that these words were surreptitiously and fraudulently added to what the Christian world already had come to consider SACRED writings—God's very Word. The fraud becomes monstrous and unforgivable when viewed in this light, for here we have a mere man presumptuously palming off his own forged words as the words of God incarnate in Jesus!

Part of the mental picture of Jesus, which I—and countless others—have carried from boyhood includes these patient words of forgiveness, uttered from the cross, at a time when he must have been undergoing exquisite agonies. When therefore we learn that the words are spurious, sorrow overwhelms us, and then a sudden fury burns within us. When we learn further that the whole episode of the woman taken in adultery was similarly "added" to the Gospel of Luke in a later Century (including the kindly admonition, "let him who is without fault cast the first stone,") our fury knows no bounds, for these humane words also inevitably formed an essential part of our mental portrait of Jesus.

To illustrate still further how spurious additions to a Gospel text have become an "accepted" part of the New Testament, permit me to quote several verses from the 24th Chapter of Luke, indicating in capital letters the forged additions, detected by comparison with older manuscripts of Luke. As you read, keep in mind that ALL portions shown in caps are forged: only the words in small letters are in the original manuscripts of Luke. Where comments are made, they appear in parentheses:

> Luke 24: 6 HE IS NOT HERE BUT IS RISEN (again, as in Mark, we find that the "testimony" of Jesus' resurrection is forged): remember how he spoke unto you when he was yet in Galilee. . . .
>
> Luke 24: 36 Jesus stood in the midst of them AND SAITH UNTO THEM, PEACE BE UNTO YOU (the copyist could not resist adding his two cents' worth). . . .
>
> Luke 24: 40 AND WHEN HE HAD SPOKEN, HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS AND FEET (even this "testimony" as to the evidence of his purported resurrection, which would be verified by the nailholes in his hands and feet, is forged). . . .
>
> Luke 24: 42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish AND OF A HONEYCOMB (again the copyist simply could not restrain himself from adding some words of his own). . . .
>
> Luke 24: 51 And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them AND WAS CARRIED UP INTO HEAVEN (here the copyist adds quite a mouthful, providing manufactured evidence of Jesus' ascension). . . .

Each of the additions to Luke's text shown above in capital letters is what scholars eruditely and politely call an interpolation, but the word "interpolation" is, to be sure, only a euphemistic synonym for the word forgery. Yet these and other known interpolations are allowed to remain in the Bibles on our livingroom tables, and these interpolations are regarded by many as God's very Word!

Some of the fraudulent additions in the passages cited, as we can see, are of little or no importance, except as they serve to confirm the established custom of early Christian copyists to add words of their own to the words of a purportedly "sacred" Gospel. Devout copyists apparently did not consider it wrong or improper to add a word here and a verse there. Some additions were in truth quite innocuous, but when additions were made to the text which conveyed manufactured evidence of Jesus' resurrection and ascension for example, it was altogether another matter, and the harm that such additions could do was very real and truly immeasurable, and constituted an impious crime against God and truth.

Perhaps the Christian brethren wondered about or questioned the Ascension of Jesus. Very well, the pious copyist might have said to himself, let me take it upon myself to clear this matter up in their minds once and for all, and he proceeded to add the words now found in Luke 24: 51, namely, "AND WAS CARRIED UP INTO HEAVEN." This addition clears up any doubt, for now we are assured by the Word of "God" that the ascension took place. In after years, who would know but that these words were written by Luke himself under divine inspiration; or, if no inspiration were involved, a reader might suppose that Luke might have obtained this information from an eyewitness to the event.

But how can any religious belief be sustained on deliberately forged evidence such as this? Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15: 6) said that thousands had witnessed the Ascension of Jesus, yet not one of these thousands that he mentions has given his individual testimony on this point. I am wrong. Paul said "above five hundred" had witnessed the Ascension. But I said "thousands" deliberately, to illustrate the same mode of speech in modern idiom. When we want to impress our listeners, we today say: "thousands know . . ." or "thousands have experienced . . ." etc., even though we know that our expression is not numerically accurate. So Paul may have used the expression "above five hundred."

In any case, Paul testifies for them. They do not testify for themselves. This is what attorneys term "hearsay" evidence, which is incompetent and inadmissible as courtroom evidence, and should certainly be regarded with grave suspicion, inasmuch as not a single one of all these five hundred has left his direct testimony for our edification. Furthermore, it is possible that Paul's testimony may very well have been hearsay evidence twice removed, because he was not himself a witness to the Ascension, and may have gotten his information from another who was a non-witness too.

But to further assure his auditors, Paul goes on to declare, in 1 Corinthians 15: 8: "besides which the risen Jesus was SEEN BY ME also." Yet a few verses further on he makes the following rather equivocal statement:

> 1 Corinthians 15: 14-15 IF Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain; yea, and we are FALSE WITNESSES of God: because we have testified of God that he raised up Jesus; whom he raised not IF SO BE THAT THE DEAD RISE NOT. . . .

I suggest that we thoughtfully re-read this Corinthian passage twice over. Do we, or can we get the impression that Paul is in any way CERTAIN that Jesus had risen? And certain he would have been had he himself seen the risen Jesus, as he had declared shortly before, or if he knew for a fact that "over five hundred" had witnessed Jesus' ascension. He affirms that he (and others) are false witnesses "if" it is true that "the dead rise not." This is surely not the statement of one who is sure of himself, or sure of his facts; and this is the more surprising because if he had seen the risen Jesus, as he solemnly testifies, did he doubt the witness of his own senses?

Perhaps this testimony was the "lie" he refers to in his Epistle to the Romans, where he declares:

> Romans 3: 7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded through MY LIE unto His glory; why yet am I also judged a sinner . . . ?

Moreover, if Paul knew from personal observation that Jesus had indeed risen, what need had he to argue in 1 Corinthians 15: 35 ff, that resurrection "MUST" BE A FACT from the analogy that what is sowed must die before it is quickened?

> 1 Corinthians 15: 35-36 But how are the dead raised up? . . .
> Fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. . . .

For one thing, this is a very dangerous analogy because it is fallacious as it applies to the resurrection which Christian theology teaches. And why should Paul contend that resurrection must be a fact, BY ANALOGY, if he could cite his own immediate experience of the fact? The analogy of the seed would prove only that a man lives again, not in himself, but in his children! This is not resurrection as Christian theology teaches it, for theology tells us each man, if he rise at all, shall rise himself.

Again, in Paul's very first epistle, addressed to the Thessalonians, we read:

> 1 Thessalonians 4: 14 For if (or since) we "believe" that Jesus died and rose again. . . .

Here too the very language that Paul uses, as in the passages already quoted, betrays his apparent lack of certain knowledge, for he appears to be saying that Jesus' resurrection is for him (and the others) a matter of "belief" or faith, which it need not have been, had he had firm or direct knowledge of the fact.

The much altered verses from the 24th Chapter of Luke, quoted above, are excellent examples of what we might call the method of altering or corrupting the text by "insertion," adding here a phrase and there an extra word or two, thus subtly manufacturing false evidence to substantiate the writer's own ideas about Jesus or to "verify" some doctrine of the Christian religious group to which the copyist belonged.

Another quite similar method of altering the text was by out-and-out addition, incorporating new matter bodily into the text, a type of forgery where evidence is made "of the whole cloth," as the saying is. Such additions are well illustrated by the last eleven verses in the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark. These verses, you will recall, provide forged evidence of Jesus' resurrection by testifying to the three post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus related therein, and also provide forged evidence for the doctrine of baptism, as well as for the doctrine of Jesus' ascension:

> Mark 16: 16 He that believeth AND IS BAPTIZED shall be saved. . . .
>
> Mark 16: 19 After the Lord had spoken unto them, HE WAS RECEIVED UP INTO HEAVEN. . . .

Other examples of additions to the text to which we have already referred are:

(1) The complete verse in 1 John 5: 7, which falsely "verifies" the doctrine of the Trinity.

(2) The dying words put into Jesus' mouth by a later copyist of Luke ("Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—Luke 23: 34).

(3) The story of the woman taken in adultery, with its punchline, "let him who is without fault cast the first stone"—John 8: 3-11. This entire episode was added to the forged book of John in the Sixth Century.

The methods which for convenience I call "insertion" and "addition," often blend and fuse; sometimes a few words are tacked on to one verse, then a whole new verse is added and the insertions and additions all run together and become an accepted part of what purports to be an authentic text.

The alteration of Biblical texts was a usage of long standing amongst Jewish scribes and copyists for centuries prior to Jesus' birth. This practice has now been strongly confirmed by an examination of the Dead Sea scrolls. For example, fragments of an old scroll of Samuel dating back to 300 B.C. (one of the older scrolls "unrolled" from the Qumran Dead Sea "library") reveal a high proportion of discrepant readings—that is, readings which do not agree with the text of Samuel which has come down to us, and which we now use.

Only occasionally do the inscriptions on these ancient Dead Sea fragments agree with the text of Samuel according to the two main sources for our present-day Bible text—one deriving from the ancient Greek "Septuagint" version, and the other deriving from the ancient Hebrew, so-called "Masoretic," version. In fact, more than half of the words on these scroll fragments have since been altered from what they were in 300 B.C. Some occasional readings agree with the Greek Septuagint version, and a scant few agree with the Hebrew Masoretic version (which forms the basis of the Revised Version). How then can we possibly affirm that our text is authentic?

Another method of deliberate text alteration (in addition to the methods we have called insertion and addition) is what might be euphemistically called "paraphrasing." The old text is copied, but "with a difference." No longer is a word or phrase inserted here, or a passage added there, but now a word or phrase in the text being copied is actually changed—sometimes slightly, sometimes completely—giving the passage a new sense, a different meaning than that intended in the original composition. An example in English literature might help clarify this method. Shakespeare's Hamlet says:

> Give me the man who is not PASSION'S slave. . . .

This means one thing, but let us read the passage:

> Give me the man who is not FASHION'S slave. . . .

Now we have an entirely new and different meaning, although the words used are quite similar, and sound somewhat alike. Both meanings make sense to be sure, but one is the meaning intended by the playwright, the other a misquotation.

Such misquotations of Shakespeare's text were often accidental, and no doubt some of the "misquotations" in the Bible are errors of transcription by careless or tired scribes, or the result of haste, poor light, interruption, etc. But the misquotations we are here concerned about were conscious and deliberate misquotations, and for this reason I have called this method of altering the text "paraphrasing" rather than "misquotation," to rule out such misquotations as might be considered the result of accident or carelessness.

But by the same token I do not wish, by the use of such a mild word as "paraphrasing," to give the impression that we are to consider that such deliberate tampering with the text should be condoned or but lightly censured. For such tampering is to be severely condemned whether we believe that the text was an all-out human composition, or believe it to be the inspired word of Divine Revelation. Of course, the condemnation should by all odds be more severe on the part of those who regard the Scriptural text to be God's very Word. And this heavy condemnation applies with equal force to all methods of text alteration we have outlined.

The reprehensible practice of altering the text must have started a long way back. Once more the Dead Sea scrolls bear witness to the antiquity of this evil and unfortunate practice. Before the discovery of these scrolls, for example, we had two divergent but equally authoritative readings of Deuteronomy 32: 41-43, one deriving from our oldest authoritative GREEK version (the Septuagint), the other from our oldest authoritative HEBREW version (the Masoretic). One of these versions reads:

> Rejoice ye, O Heavens, with him and let all the angels of God worship him. Rejoice all ye nations with his people. . . .

The other of these two versions merely says:

> Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people. . . .

But the version discovered in the Dead Sea scrolls—and this version is older and earlier than either the Greek or Hebrew versions mentioned above—DIFFERS FROM BOTH our authoritative or "accepted" readings, and reads as follows:

> Rejoice, O ye Heavens, with him and all YE GODS worship him. . . .

As we can readily see, those who copied the more ancient version, deliberately eliminated any mention of the "other" gods in the one version, and changed the word "gods" to "angels" in the other version. Both copyists had the same motive, viz., to conceal the ancient belief in many gods, and to make the text conform to their "more enlightened" belief in a single God.

There is nothing criminally wrong in this, except that if the original text was God's Word, the copiers had no right to alter HIS Word. If God had revealed that there were many gods other than He, who were they to correct Him? Did they—mere men—pretend that their knowledge of such things was greater than God's?

Let us recall to the reader the many Genesis passages which we cited in an earlier chapter which indicated that not one, but several gods (according to the original text) created the world and dealt with men in the garden of Eden, at the Tower of Babel, etc. The truth is that belief in a single God was a rather late development in the thought of mankind. But again, alas, if Genesis is God's Word, must we not accept God's testimony that many gods exist? If it is God's Word, why do we stubbornly refuse to accept what He tells us?

Whatever the motives were which impelled the scribes and copyists to alter the text, whether their motives were pious or evil, the practice of alteration must be considered equally culpable, in view of the fact that the future reader is deceived in any case into thinking that the text transmitted to him comes from the lips of God, whereas if the truth were known, it more often flowed from the pen of the scribes who copied His purported Word.

So strong a hold do these forged gospel verses sometimes have upon the mind, that even learned and competent Christian scholars of today often prefer to pretend to accept the implications of the spurious additions rather than what seems, upon all counts, to be the more authentic truth. For example, despite the fact that they may be convinced that the dying words attributed to Jesus in Luke are fraudulent, the invention of some Christian of a later century, they are apparently reluctant to believe that Jesus uttered the more realistic words of wild despair and deep disappointment reported by Mark:

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me . . . ?

As that outstanding Bible commentator, Rev. W. K. Lowther Clarke, a dedicated orthodox scholar, remarks, commenting on this verse in his "Concise Bible Commentary":

> Mark could not have meant that God had forsaken Jesus. . . .

We are puzzled. If Mark CANNOT have meant this, then what do the words spoken by Jesus and reported by Mark mean? Are we to understand that the language of the Bible is to be understood differently from the way we ordinarily understand words? We could not then truly be sure of the meaning of any word that is written in the Bible, if it were indeed true that in the Bible words may not mean what they mean in ordinary usage and conversation.

So powerful a hold do the forged and spurious dying words have over us who have been indoctrinated in the accepted or orthodox theological view of Jesus that anything which seems to go contrary to this view, we are convinced, MUST be wrong, even though it appears in a gospel (the Gospel of Mark) which is generally held to be divinely inspired; and, if not inspired, is the earliest and therefore probably the most authentic of all the gospels. It is the gospel too on which all the later gospels are founded.

Because the dying words of Jesus reported by Mark do not fit into the carefully inculcated and long-held doctrine of Jesus' divinity nor the doctrine of atonement, we would fain shut our eyes upon them, and mentally discard them as obviously mistaken or unreal. But under what color or warrant of right do we reject God's Word—if we hold to the belief that the gospels are the inspired Word of God—just because it runs contrary to OUR OWN cherished beliefs? Would it not seem more probable that we are mistaken and that God is not?

We surely cannot escape from the fact that the dying words of Jesus recorded in Mark are part of an ostensibly inspired gospel. If we say that Mark did not mean what he said, it seems to me that we are saying in effect that God's inspiration was faulty. Can we charge God with inspiring men to write words which do not mean what they clearly seem to mean?

If I say that I will meet you at six this evening, but I actually mean that I will not meet you until tomorrow at seven, language as a serious means of communication becomes useless; and on the other hand, if I say that I will meet you at six this evening—meaning just that—and YOU think that my words signify that I will not meet you until tomorrow at seven, communication becomes impossible because you do not take my words to mean what they are intended to mean.

It seems to me that we are reduced to accept the words in Mark at their face value, or abandon any attempt to make sense out of any passage in the Bible. The same of course goes for the words in Matthew and Luke which record Joseph and Mary's ignorance of Jesus' purported virgin birth. We must accept the implications of these words or give up any hope of understanding the Bible.

Upon the whole the early Christian Fathers, considering the circumstances, did rather well and showed much ingenuity in their attempt to sustain the strange doctrines of Christianity, by altering a word here and inserting a phrase there, but just because the truth cannot be altogether hidden from the eye of reason and logic, and because those who fabricate lies often become entangled in their own invented falsifications and innocently slip up once in a while, they could not entirely conceal or cover up their forgeries and their unauthorized interpolations in what they claimed was "sacred" Writ.

Time, accident and deliberate destruction of ancient manuscripts has no doubt made it impossible for us to detect ALL of the forgeries and fraudulent additions to the original records of Jesus' life and Jesus' words, but enough evidence remains—ENOUGH REMAINS—to betray the pernicious practice of these early theologians, to impose their frauds upon the vast body of unsuspecting Christian believers.

Enough evidence remains too, to establish beyond question the habit and practice of ancient copyists to alter texts they transcribed, not only with complete freedom, but often with presumptuous license, to suit their needs and to unmercifully wrest the text to fit their own interpretation of the facts. Because all manuscripts had to be copied by hand, there was no great difficulty to make whatever changes they deemed proper.

The practice of "paraphrasing" and forging additions to the so-called sacred text is amply verified in the case of the scribes who copied the books of the Old Testament for the Dead Sea scrolls sect. Members of the Qumran (Dead Sea) sect often deliberately changed the Bible texts they were copying to make the texts conform to "their" doctrines, just as later on the new "Messiah" (or Christian) sect was to alter the text again to conform with their particular beliefs about Jesus.

It might be well to say a few words about the origin of the desert, monastic-like community where the scrolls were copied. The community, we are told, was founded by a group whose leader was called, by way of distinction, the Teacher of Righteousness. He and his followers it appears were forced, because of persecution by the so-named "Wicked Priest" at Jerusalem, to flee the Holy City, and they subsequently established their communal home in the isolated Qumran desert area. The Wicked Priest has been tentatively identified by some as the Jewish Priest-King, Alexander Jannaeus, whose reign extended from 104 B.C. to 78 B.C.

So similar are some of the Qumran ideas and beliefs to the ideas and teachings of Jesus that one feels almost certain that Jesus must have been much influenced by these Qumran teachings or by the teachings of a very similar sect. Like Jesus, for example, the members of the Qumran sect thought they discerned definite signs in contemporary events which—to them—clearly portended the END of the world, and augured the imminent advent of a Kingdom of God on earth.

The Qumran community likewise expected the coming of a priestly Messiah, and referred to him as the "Teacher of Righteousness," calling him by the same name and title which they applied to their Founder; so that it appears possible that they anticipated the Founder's resurrection in the "Last Days." These and other Qumran ideas are so like those which the gospels report about Jesus that one is given greatly to wonder. One muses whether these ideas may not have been borrowed bodily from the Qumran teachings and Qumran documents, and applied to Jesus, either by Jesus himself or by his followers.

The Dead Sea sect also expected another, "lay" Messiah or "Anointed One," of the line of David. This Davidic descent, as we have seen, was also claimed on Jesus' behalf, to further substantiate his Messianic claim. Still another remarkable coincidence—if it is a coincidence—may be noted in this connection, viz., the prophecy of Isaiah 11: 10 regarding "the shoot out of the stock of Jesse" was applied to the Teacher of Righteousness as well as to Jesus.

The Qumran sectaries saw the coming of this shoot of David as "ordained" for the salvation of Israel, and we have but to compare this conceit with the very similar notion in Matthew, to recognize the close kinship of the two ideas:

> Matthew 1: 21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save (=is ordained to save) HIS PEOPLE (the Israelites) from their sins. . . .

While I wish to make it clear that absolutely no evidence exists to connect Jesus with actual membership in the Dead Sea scrolls community, perhaps the persistent tradition that the gospel writers report, that Jesus WENT INTO THE DESERT, as they say "forty days"—ostensibly to be "tempted"—may grow out of an affiliation with this very community. Most traditions sprout from some kernel of fact, however exaggerated, attenuated, transformed, or transfigured. Perhaps the trials of Jesus' "temptation" in the desert merely expressed in allegorical language the disciplines of this or another community of religious meditation, wherein Jesus spent some years as a student or acolyte. The reader may be particularly intrigued to learn also that the Qumran desert area lies close to Bethlehem, the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

All these implications, of course, constitute pure and gratuitous conjecture on my part, but if the conjecture could be otherwise bolstered or corroborated, it would not necessarily be defeated by the phrase "forty days." Forty days would probably seem too short a time for anyone to assimilate the Qumran teachings, but the Biblical expression "forty days" did not in point of fact mean forty days in any literal sense, but usually had reference to a period of indefinite duration, much as our modern idiom "a month of Sundays," often used by those who wish to indicate a protracted period of time of indefinitely long duration. The use of "forty days" in this indefinite sense can be found in the Old Testament in Exodus 24: 18, and in 1 Kings 19: 8,

Jesus expressed the SAME urgency too as those of the Qumran sect apparently felt, to prepare for the Last Days, and he had the same idea that a kingdom of God was looming imminently on the horizon; and like them, he is reported to have discerned "signs" that pointed to the prompt and impending advent of the world's termination. Their teachings regarding poverty, humility, etc., also coincided in a remarkable way with the teachings of Jesus.

If one were permitted the luxury of a pure guess, perhaps one might conjecture that Jesus spent some years of the so-called thirty "silent" years—before he emerged like a comet as a full-fledged "prophet" and began his meteoric public ministry—studying or meditating under the influence of, if not this, then a similar community. This would account for his precipitate emergence at thirty from total obscurity, and would account too for the basic themes of his "doctrinal" preaching, viz., (1) the imminence of the END; (2) the imminent approach of the Kingdom of God; and (3) the prompt advent of the Messiah.

One of the most fascinating occupations to while away an hour is to become lost in reverie about these thirty silent years of Jesus, just as literary historians are often lost in wondering surmise about the "silent years" of Shakespeare before his emergence as a journeyman writer of plays.

Who knows? Perhaps not God, but the Qumran community planted the historic seed of "doctrinal" Christianity. In any event the Qumran ideas seem definitely to have reached out and touched Jesus and those who followed in his footsteps.

Father Geoffrey Graystone, the distinguished Catholic scholar, tells us in his excellent book, "Dead Sea Scrolls and the Originality of Christ," that members of the Dead Sea Qumran sect apparently believed, quoting him (but the caps are mine):

> . . . that the first and only coming of the Messiah which they believed to be NEAR AT HAND would herald the END of the world, when God would judge all men and admit HIS ELECT into eternal life. . . .

While Father Graystone freely acknowledges that these were the beliefs which the Dead Sea sect held, he makes no mention of the clear parallel between these beliefs and the teachings of Jesus. Yet these things are precisely what Jesus himself taught, even to the Elect of God:

> Matthew 24: 3 The disciples came unto him, saying . . . tell us, what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the END of the world . . . ?
>
> Matthew 24: 21-24 (Jesus answered) There shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning . . . and except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the ELECT'S sake, whom He hath chosen, those days shall be shortened. . . . False Messiahs . . . shall show great signs . . . insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very ELECT. . . .
>
> Matthew 24: 29-31 After the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light and the stars SHALL FALL FROM HEAVEN, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken. Then shall appear the sign of the SON OF MAN (Jesus' adopted title) in heaven . . . then shall the tribes of earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man (that is to say, me) COMING IN THE CLOUDS of heaven . . . and He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together HIS ELECT. . . .
>
> Matthew 24: 33-34 When you shall see . . . these things, know that it is very near, even at the very door. . . . Verily I say unto you, THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS TILL ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE FULFILLED. . . .

This Biblical quotation, in Jesus' own words, as reported by the author of Matthew, establishes that Jesus, like the Dead Sea (Qumran) sect, believed firmly that the coming of the Messiah was near at hand ("AT THE VERY DOOR"), for does not Jesus solemnly assure his disciples that ALL these things (including therefore even his "return") shall be fulfilled during the very generation during which he and they lived?

The cryptic title "Son of Man" twice used by Jesus in the above verses is one which—as I have elsewhere indicated—Jesus used in referring to himself some eighty times in his recorded sayings in the gospels. As we had attempted to demonstrate in Chapter One, Jesus was apparently convinced in his own mind that he was to fill the role of the "Son of Man" alluded to by the prophet Daniel, in Daniel 7: 13, and therefore adopted this title for himself. In addition, in Daniel's "prophecy," the Son of Man is pictured as "coming in the clouds of heaven," just as Jesus assures his disciples he will therefore come; and this shall occur, he tells them, before the generation of men to whom he addresses his remarks shall have passed away.

This assurance was of course never to be fulfilled and would give the lie to Jesus' words, and would cause the faithful some moments of anxious perplexity. But it is clarion clear from a hundred contexts that Jesus believed that the coming of the Messiah was imminent or very near at hand—indeed at their very door, to use his own words—JUST AS the Dead Sea sectaries believed. The only difference between his belief and theirs was that he entertained a corollary belief that he himself was to be that Messiah.

There can be no doubt that Jesus believed in the "Elect" too, for he makes several allusions to this belief in the Matthew passage we have quoted.

Father Graystone, in the book referred to above, also takes cognizance of the fact that the Dead Sea sect taught that the wicked would be punished in "the obscurity of ETERNAL fire." Jesus taught this too, and this is a teaching that can be amply verified by many passages. We will here quote but one:

> Matthew 25: 31-41 When the SON OF MAN (=Jesus) shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him . . . before him shall be gathered all nations . . . and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats . . . then shall the King say unto them (the sheep) on his right hand: Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION (implying predetermination of the Elect) . . . then shall he say also to them (the goats) on the left hand. . . . Depart from me, ye accursed, into EVERLASTING fire. . . .

We will not concern ourselves with the impossibility of reconciling the conception of infinite forgiveness taught elsewhere by Jesus (see Matthew 18: 21-22, "seventy times seven") and the idea here taught, that punishment by God shall be "everlasting," with its implication that there shall be NO forgiveness, ever, but only torment eternally, world without end.

In his book, Father Graystone makes this further most illuminating statement:

> Catholic scholars of note, not to speak of many independent scholars, are so struck with the similarities of vocabulary (in the Dead Sea scrolls) . . . that they admit that the New Testament writers, particularly John and Paul, borrowed formulae and expressions from the scrolls. . . .
>
> —"*Dead Sea Scrolls and the Originality of Christ*"

The scrolls constantly refer to the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness," expressions which do not occur in the Old Testament, else we might say that the author of John, and Paul, might have derived this phraseology from that source. A few notable New Testament passages, which contain striking resemblances to the Dead Sea scrolls in phrase and vocabulary are given below for the reader's examination:

> 1 Thessalonians 5: 5 (Paul's earliest epistle) Ye are all the "children of light" and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. . . .
>
> 2 Corinthians 6: 14 Be ye not yoked with unbelievers . . . for what communion hath light with darkness . . . ?
>
> Luke 16: 8 For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the "children of light". . . .
>
> John 1: 4-5 In him (Jesus) was life: and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not. . . .
>
> John 3: 19-21 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light . . . but he that "doeth truth" cometh to the light. . . .

In this passage is found a highly characteristic phrase, namely, to "do" truth, which is found in the scrolls and not apparently elsewhere, except in these early Christian writings.

> John 8: 12 Then spake Jesus . . . I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not work in darkness but shall have the light of life. . . .
>
> John 12: 35-36 Then Jesus said . . . Yet a little while is the light with you . . . walk while ye have light, lest the darkness come upon you . . . while ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be "children of light". . . .
>
> 1 John 1: 6-7 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and DO NOT THE TRUTH (again this characteristic phrase of the scrolls) but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light. . . .
>
> 1 Peter 2: 9 Shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. . . .
>
> 1 John 2: 9-10 He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness . . . he that loveth his brother abideth in the light. . . .
>
> Ephesians 5: 8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are light in the Lord: walk as "children of light". . . .

Canon Coppens, another distinguished Catholic scholar, makes this acknowledgement:

> The contacts (i.e., the similarities) of vocabulary of Pauline passages with the (Dead Sea) Manual of Discipline are SO NUMEROUS AND MANIFEST (his words, my caps) one has the impression that the Apostle (that is, as we would say, the author of John) is addressing converts to Christianity from the Qumran sect. . . .

When scholars of strict orthodox commitment like Father Graystone and Canon Coppens are willing to make the broad and important concessions I have quoted above, we may be sure that the evidence is very compelling, however such scholars may attempt to explain away the relevancy of such evidence to established Christian theology.

Besides the resemblances already noted, including the intense longing for a Messiah who would "deliver" or free Israel from her subjection to a foreign power, together with the expectation of Messiah's imminent advent (accompanied by the world's end and the establishment of some sort of earthly kingdom of God), we have countless other points of similitude between matter found in the Dead Sea scrolls and matter found in the Christian "sacred" writings.

For example, "publicans and sinners" were two categories of men whom the Dead Sea sect consigned to eternal perdition. Jesus' own similar prejudice toward publicans (and heathens) is betrayed by his remark in Matthew 18: 17, where it is recorded he said:

> Matthew 18: 17 Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. . . .

In this passage it is apparent that the word "publican" is used by Jesus as a term of extreme derogation, if not outright contempt.

Again, the practice of voluntary celibacy amongst the Qumran sect in their quest for perfection foreshadows the similar Christian practice which forbade Christian priests to marry, and is reflected in Jesus' own teachings, reported in the gospel of Matthew:

> Matthew 19: 12 There be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs (that is, have taken a vow of permanent celibacy) for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. . . .

The evident similarities of doctrine, teaching and belief are so strong, in the opinion of many dedicated scholars, that the Dead Sea scrolls may easily one day come to be universally regarded as the "missing link" between Christianity and Old Testament Judaism. This would mean that we could no longer regard the rise of Christianity as a "revelation," but would have to view it as a gradual historic evolution from the past, growing out of Old Testament Judaism by way of some earnest Judaic movement or sect like the Essenes, of which the Qumran Community was perhaps an example, or again perhaps, its very flower.

In any case, it must be realized that a statement which reads that "Jesus was apparently much influenced by the teachings of the Dead Sea sect"—if it can be verified, and as it is being verified by many scholars working independently of each other on the ancient scrolls of this sect—will again confirm Jesus' complete humanity, freed of any supernatural or divine power or wisdom. We humans are what we are because of influences, physical or other, that work upon us or which are brought to bear, but if Jesus had actually been God or One Person of a Divine Trinity, or the Word made flesh, or any similar mystical Being, he must have been ABOVE or OUTSIDE such "influences," and in no way subject to the influences which affect ordinary human beings.

In other words, were he other than human, Jesus would have brought his own ideas, his own teachings, his own thoughts with the stamp and mintage of Heaven fresh upon them, and would not have been so thoroughly saturated with and "influenced" by contemporary thoughts and beliefs of the age in which he was born. Jesus would not have been subject for instance to the ignorance of his times regarding demoniac "possession": the belief that demons or "spirits of evil," or unclean spirits caused many disabilities, such as blindness, lunacy, etc.

Curiously, this very theory of demoniac possession can be viewed as an apparent corollary to the doctrine of the "Two Spirits," which is basic to the Dead Sea religious philosophy. The "Two Spirits" are symbolically represented as Light and Darkness and correspond to the dual tensions within each of us for good and evil, the spirit or spirits of light or goodness pulling us one way, and the spirit or spirits of darkness, evil, and perversity pulling us another.

All this may sound strange to modern ears, yet all religion is concerned with just such a conflict within us, although today we do not personify these spirits (which is to say, we do not regard them as having an entity or existence of their own), nor do we pretend that we are able to converse with these spirits as Jesus is reported to have done. To us these "spirits" are only abstract symbols, helpful in describing our inner tensions, but they have no real life or personality of their own, as was apparently believed, for example, by Jesus himself.

According to the Dead Sea sect, each of us is born with a certain proportion of the spirits of darkness (or evil) and a certain proportion of the spirits of light (or good). The exact proportion, they believed, could be numerically calculated and their relative numbers depended upon the position of the planets at our birth. This bit of early astrology was developed by later astrologers to a point where, depending upon "our stars" (the horoscope of our birth-day), we were filled with certain "humors" in certain definite measures, which gave us an overall saturnine disposition or a jovial one, and so on. If Saturn or Jupiter happened to be in the ascendant, we would inherit at our birth definite "disposing" elements, the exact mixture of which would be subject to certain conjunctions or mystic relations in our horoscope.

According to the Qumran (Dead Sea) sect, the percentage of "light" and "darkness" in each of us is established then by the stars' position or the planets' aspect at our birth. In this pre-determined inheritance of light and darkness, we may detect the germ of the idea of "the Elect" which the sect, and as we have seen, Jesus also taught. Those in whom the Spirits of Light were largely present were called by the Dead Sea sect "children of light" or "sons of light," and those who "did not the truth" as their phrase went, were called "the children of darkness." We have already seen from examples cited a little while back, how this terminology or habit of expression was adopted by Paul and the unknown author of John, and other New Testament writers.

The Cosmos, according to the Dead Sea sect, was divided, so to speak, into two camps: the spirits of Truth and Light, and the spirits of Perversion, Darkness and Error, resembling in this respect the "sheep" and "goats" of Jesus' doctrine. (See Matthew 25: 31-41, formerly quoted in this chapter). In Jesus' doctrine, as in theirs, in the moral sense, there were no grays, only whites and blacks. This of course is hardly realistic.

Inasmuch as your possession of "Light" is purely an accident of birth, your election to the lucky group which shall be "saved" is apparently predetermined by God, a highly immoral and infamous theory, discrediting, as it must, the impartial justice of God, and His equal love toward all His creatures.

Whatever we may conclude regarding Jesus' relationship to the Sect of Qumran, the immovable fact remains that there are certain definite and important points of similarity between the teachings and beliefs of the Dead Sea sect and the teachings and beliefs of Jesus that can neither be denied nor brusquely thrust aside. No amount of subtle double-talk, or cautious admonition against accepting these points of similitude too hastily or attaching too much significance to them, can change their essential and obvious affinity.

Anyone might easily err in the interpretation or presentation of some particular details—and indeed I am probably guilty of some factual errors and errors of judgment and logic in these pages—but the over-all picture, the important conclusions, cannot be lightly dismissed. Nor here, can the really basic resemblances between Christianity and the Dead Sea Sect be gainsaid or satisfactorily controverted:

(1) Both Jesus and the Dead Sea Sect believed and taught that they were living in the LAST DAYS. Both saw in current events "signs" that the END was near:

> Matthew 16: 3 (Jesus is speaking) O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times . . . ?

The prophet Malachi had made a "prophecy" that Elijah would return and his return would be a "sign" or omen that would betoken to all that the Great Day of the Lord was near:

> Malachi 4: 5 Behold, I will send Elijah the prophet BEFORE the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. . . .

Jesus is represented as teaching his disciples that this prophecy HAD BEEN FULFILLED in John the Baptist, whom Jesus declared was Elijah returned to life:

> Matthew 17: 10 ff And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias (=Elijah) must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first (that is, before the END) . . . but I say unto you, that Elias IS COME ALREADY . . . then the disciples understood that he spake to them of John the Baptist. . . .

This was one sign in whose accomplishment Jesus read a fulfillment of the Malachian prophecy, which therefore indicated that the END of the world was near at hand. The mission of John the Baptist, according to Mark 1: 2-4, was a fulfillment of an Isaiac prophecy, to wit:

> Isaiah 40: 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. . . .

It was apparently because of this prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus believed that he might be destined to be the looked-for Messiah, for had not John the Baptist "prepared the way" before Jesus? This thought is reflected in Mark's gospel:

> Mark 1: 24 As it is written in the Prophets, behold, I send my messenger . . . which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness. . . .

John the Baptist (not to be confused with John the Apostle) preached repentance and baptized "IN THE DESERT" (Mark 1: 4). Then, when John was arrested, Jesus, in a sense, succeeded him, but Jesus' preaching was now infinitely more urgent, for Jesus now had apparently concluded that John had been the resurrected (but unrecognized) Elijah, whose coming—the Hebrew prophets had foretold—would immediately precede the END. We can well understand, in view of this belief on Jesus' part regarding John the Baptist, why his preaching took on such an insistent tone that the Kingdom of God WAS at hand—at their very door—and that the END of the world would come, indeed, in his own generation.

One amazingly curious and significant thing for us to consider is that the Qumran (Dead Sea) community invoked the VERY SAME Isaiac prophecy as authority for or confirmation of THEIR exile or withdrawal into the desert. They too were "preparing the way of the Lord IN THE DESERT."

(2) Both Jesus and the Dead Sea Sect believed and taught that days of severe and unparalleled affliction were impending. (See Mark 13: 19.)

(3) Both Jesus and the Dead Sea Sect—in common with their fellow Jews—cherished hopes of a Messiah who would free the Jewish nations from their subjection to Rome and who would usher in a Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Jesus had somehow reached the conclusion that he himself was to fill this Messianic role, and how strongly he held this soon-to-be disappointed belief is demonstrated by his cry of unbelieving despair, when the legions of angels he might have expected did not come to rescue him from the cross of death:

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me . . . ?

(4) Both Jesus and the Dead Sea Sect believed in "everlasting" punishment, eternal torment, and quenchless hell-fires.

(5) Both Jesus and the Sect believed in the doctrine of the Elect:

> Mark 13: 24-26 (Jesus is speaking) In those days, after the TRIBULATION, the sun shall be darkened, and . . . the stars of heaven shall fall. . . . Then shall they see me (the Son of Man) coming in the clouds . . . then shall he send his angels and gather HIS ELECT. . . .

Here, as elsewhere, it is not intended as a disparagement or derogation of Jesus to say that he borrowed his ideas from contemporary thought or from the literature of the past. What we merely wish to establish is that many of his ideas and beliefs were the same as those of the Dead Sea Scrolls Sect. The influence of this sect, or some other group whose beliefs were similar to theirs, on Jesus' teachings, can hardly be denied. Jesus' teachings did NOT present an entirely new or original doctrine, but a doctrine that grew naturally out of his times. And this is unfortunate.

It is unfortunate because some of the ideas which he borrowed (for example those cited above, including the concept of eternal punishment) were actually, it seems to me, in conflict with his own deep ethical convictions, and contrary to his concept of a beneficent God. To be sure, the borrowed ideas could not—and do not—cancel out his great ethical pronouncements, but by the same token, these borrowed notions were to seriously handicap the borning Christian religion, and handicap it to this day.

For in order to accommodate ALL of Jesus' teachings, including his mistaken belief that he was the Messiah, and his promise of a speedy return, complicated theories HAD to be shaped and developed to account for such things—or for their failure to come to pass. Paul has often been "accused" of being the real founder of Christianity, rather than Jesus, because of the sophisticated doctrines he is credited with having worked out and promulgated regarding Jesus and regarding the meaning of Jesus' "message." Some say that these doctrines of Paul contrast sharply with what they call the relatively "simple" teachings of Jesus.

But accepting Jesus' spiritual leadership as he sincerely did, Paul must have felt obliged not only to propagate Jesus' great moral teachings, but apparently felt that it was incumbent upon him to also expound what Jesus himself had taught about himself (viz., that he was the Messiah, and the "Son of Man" of Daniel's vision, etc.) as well as what Jesus taught about the imminent end of the world, the "Elect" of God, everlasting torture and punishment, his "return," and so on.

Let us no longer blame Paul, when the fault for the flaws in Christian theology ultimately lie squarely at Jesus' own door. The truth is that the total "doctrine" or teaching of Jesus WAS NOT SIMPLE or uncomplicated. Certain questions in relation to his teachings were inescapable and had to be plausibly answered if early "Christianity," was to survive. And Paul undertook the Gargantuan task, along with many other willing workers.

It required in truth a very complicated theology to account for all aspects of Jesus' teachings, so complicated in fact that there has never been a time since Jesus died when anything approaching total agreement has ever been achieved amongst professing Christians. One might go so far as to say that an outstanding characteristic of Christians throughout the centuries has been their dissension over points of doctrine and belief, till one might well have difficulty in defining what Christianity is. Perhaps it might be rewarding for us to attempt its definition.

Let us say first that the word "Christianity" has from the begining meant a great many different things to a great many people. In modern times it may be regarded as a "portmanteau" word, a sort of suitcase or valise into which every ethical value is stuffed, regardless of whether or not such values originated with Jesus or are to be found in his teachings, or in the teachings that have been attributed to him. All ethical values that appear to exhibit the spirit which we conceive as proper or appropriate to Jesus, whether as an historical figure or in our idealized mental picture of him as the soul of faith, the quintessence of gentleness, the model of kindliness, and the exemplar of forgiveness, have been appropriated by the word symbol "Christianity."

For two thousand years men have grown in moral stature, sometimes advancing with giant strides, sometimes with small mincing steps, but each advance in man's ethical sensitivity has served to broaden the concept of Christianity—each time the word "Christianity" has accommodated itself like the nautilus, by building itself a more stately mansion, pushing out the old walls and raising the old roof-dome, to give room to these new and ever finer ethical ideas, so that they too might reside within its expanding edifice.

There is nothing wrong with this method of development in this word's meaning, unless we fail to understand that the word belongs no longer just to Jesus, or to the "Christian" Church, but belongs rather to the world, or to the human race as a whole, or to Religion conceived as separate from the narrow sectarianism of Christian theology. Christianity, in fine, is more than the teaching of Jesus, it is more than the "doctrinal" teachings of the Christian Church community composed of countless denominations, it is more than theology; it represents in fact the best ethical ideas and practices that man can conceive or has conceived, regardless even if and when they run contrary to Jesus' own beliefs and teachings.

If we might be permitted an example, we might point out that the best ethical thought rejects Jesus' belief in everlasting hell-fire for the wicked, basing its rejection on its beneficent conception of God as an all-loving, forgiving and merciful God. We feel instinctively that no human fault or failing, or crime—however vile—could call for "everlasting" torment.

Christianity today—as I see it—no longer needs the crutch of miracle and myth, nor does it need the apron strings of mystic Christology with its doctrinal corollaries. How something can be "Christian" in the larger sense in which we now employ the word, and yet not "belong" at all to Jesus, may be illustrated by the comment which follows, on Jesus' spurious dying words in Luke ("Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"). This comment is to be found in Volume VIII of the monumental "Interpreter's Bible," a work compiled by probably the most excellent scholars in the Christian world today:

> The omission of the prayer ("Father, forgive them, etc.") by Codex Vaticanus, (its omission too from) the original text of Codex Bezae, and (its omission from) other important (ancient) manuscripts, makes it highly improbable that it stood from the beginning in Luke's Gospel. But THE SCRIBE WHO INSERTED IT (my caps) did so with a deep and true understanding of the Galilean teacher. It is one of the most TYPICALLY CHRISTIAN utterances credited to Jesus in the gospel tradition. . . .

Many things are thus recognized as "typically" Christian by the best orthodox scholars which—like these forged and fraudulent dying words—were not spoken, or taught, by Jesus. His actual dying words—or so we may suppose, because they occur in the two earliest gospels, Mark and Matthew ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?")—were not considered sufficiently expressive of the spirit of Christianity, or so at least the forger thought who inserted these new dying words in Luke's gospel, words which he no doubt regarded as more conformable to Christian doctrine and the Christian ethic idealized in the person of Jesus.

The stubborn fact remains, nonetheless, that the words which are referred to by the savants of the "Interpreter's Bible," and which are described by them as typically Christian, and which are indeed typically Christian in the broad modern sense of the word as I have defined it above, were NOT the words of Jesus at all, but the invented words of a scribe copying the Gospel of Luke in a later century.

This scribe was not satisfied to copy the gospel text as he found it, nor was he content to copy Jesus' words as he found them. Are the words of such a scribe to take precedence in the interpretation of the meaning of Christianity over Jesus' own words, as reported by Mark and Matthew? If Jesus' own words are not "expressive" of Christianity, then we must see that Christian ethics and Christian doctrine grow not from the Bible, but from man's moral nature in the case of Christian ethics, and from theologians' error in the case of Christian doctrine. In neither case do they derive from the Bible or from the words or teachings of Jesus.

Another example of how the signification of the word "Christianity" developed beyond the original thought of Jesus is in the concept that "the Kingdom of God is within us." The reader might promptly refer me to a passage in Luke, where this very concept is found on the lips of Jesus:

> Luke 17: 21 For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. . . .

But we must warn the reader that Bible scholars now unanimously agree that this verse would be more accurately translated thus:

> Luke 17:21 For behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst. . . .

This latter rendering, it is plain to see, is more in line too with Jesus' teachings elsewhere about the actual PHYSICAL coming of the Kingdom, which he expected to occur in his own generation.

The idea that the Kingdom of God is "within us" is a highly felicitous translation of Jesus' words and this erroneous rendering of the Lucan passage—even though quite accidental—may be attributed to the expanding moral nature of man. Just as the forged prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," is far nobler than Jesus' original and probably authentic prayer of anguished despair, just so the idea that the Kingdom of God is within us is far more sublime in conception—and therefore more "Christian" in the broad and universal sense—than the actual words spoken by Jesus.

After the thought that the Kingdom of God is within us was hit upon, it was probably forthwith adopted as a typically Christian idea, and has been endlessly quoted as a genuine utterance of Jesus, which however IT WAS NOT. It is of the greatest importance that we understand the deep implications of this constant evolution of man's moral and spiritual concepts.

Jesus did not give us a religion, or a new religion, complete and gift-wrapped in a box, neatly tied with ribbon. What Jesus did was to contribute to the growth of man's understanding of what religion essentially consists of; for example, that it is not something that resides in ritual or in the observance of traditional forms, but is rather something that we display in the way we comport ourselves in our relations with our fellows, and in our expression of faith, not so much with set prayers and rigid creeds, but by our earnest and constant endeavor to honor the moral law of God in our daily lives.

But if "doctrinal" Christianity did not derive from Jesus, whence did it come? We have already suggested that so-called "orthodox" evangelical Christianity, as we know it today, may have grown out of the basic teachings of the Qumran (Dead Sea scrolls) community. To support this suggestion we have given numerous illustrations of the similarity of their beliefs and teachings to the beliefs and teachings of Jesus. We have also given examples of some striking resemblances in the words and terminology used both by Dead Sea scribes and early Christian writers, in the books of the New Testament.

To illustrate in still another way the remarkable and positive similarity of the language found in the literature of the Qumran Sect and the language found in the literature of Christianity, we will cite one further example. The quotation we will give below is taken from a work found amongst the Dead Sea scrolls, entitled "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs." This work was known to scholars, but only in translation, before the discovery of the ancient scrolls, but the best scholars had been unable to fix the date of its composition with certainty. It was conjectured however that it had probably been written somewhere between 150 B.C. and the early years of the First Century A.D.

This conjecture was happily confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. The important fact for us as far as the date of its composition is concerned, is that it is now known for certain that this work was composed BEFORE the Gospel of Matthew, inasmuch as the Dead Sea Community was dispersed and the scrolls secreted in caves BEFORE the gospel of Matthew was written.

The fact of Matthew's later composition is important because it defeats the claim that the words found in the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" were copied FROM Matthew's gospel by the writer of these "Testaments," and on the other hand, it establishes that the author of Matthew (or Jesus himself) may have borrowed from this work the phraseology and ideas of the Qumran Sect. In one passage of the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" we find startlingly familiar words:

Jos. I: 5-6 I was beset with hunger and the Lord nourished me;

> I was alone and God comforted me; I was sick and the Lord visited me; I was in prison and my Lord showed favor to me; in bonds and he released me. . . .

Let us set this beside the following quotation from the "Christian" Gospel of Matthew:

> Matthew 25: 35-36 (Jesus is speaking) For I was a-hungered and ye gave me to eat; I was athirst and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; in prison and ye came unto me. . . .

Now perhaps we can better appreciate the importance of determining which was written first, for we have but to read the two passages together, to chase away any doubts that the author of Matthew must surely have borrowed the thoughts he reports in this passage from the literature of the Sect (or from some other common source), or reported these thoughts as they were related to him by a witness who had heard Jesus utter these or similar words. The pattern of thought and format of presentation is so identical in both passages that it is highly improbable that two persons writing independently of each other could have hit upon the identity of thought and used the strikingly similar phraseology which these two passages disclose.

Besides, if we believe that the author of Matthew was reporting the remembered words of Jesus, we are driven to the further inference, under the circumstances, that Jesus must himself have been the borrower. And if Jesus had indeed "studied" or spent some time—albeit more than a literal "forty days"—in the desert community of Qumran, what would be more natural than that he should recall passages from THEIR sacred literature, as we know he frequently recalled passages from Old Testament literature, and similarly used them in his dialectic and preaching.

The reader will recall how we demonstrated in an earlier chapter that the Bible story of the Flood bore the most remarkable resemblance to an earlier Babylonian account of a similar "universal" Flood. As a result, we were led to conclude that the story of the Flood found in the Bible was not in fact REVEALED to the Hebrew writers by God, but was in all probability borrowed or copied by them from the more ancient Babylonian tale, which was in turn derived from the mythological writings of still earlier peoples who flourished perhaps millenniums before the heyday of Babylon.

In making this demonstration, we pointed to the similarity of events leading up to the flood in both the Babylonian and Hebrew accounts, the similarity of events relating to the building and provision of the vessel, the similarity of events when the flood subsided, including the sending forth of ravens and doves to test its subsidence, and the similitude of events following the flood's termination. Not only were the events altogether similar but the sequence of the events followed the same order and pattern; sometimes even the phraseology was identical too.

In a similar way, the thought, ideological and verbal patterns are altogether too alike in the passage quoted from the Dead Sea scroll and the passage quoted from Matthew, to be the product of mere coincidence. The identical spirit, tone, and phrasing of the two passages mark them unmistakably as the conception of a single matrix.

Even in the matter of textual alteration, scholars have discovered that in the Dead Sea scrolls the same usages or practices prevailed amongst the copyists of these scrolls as was prevalent amongst later Christian copyists, and earlier Hebrew Old Testament scribes. John M. Allegro, in his brilliant book entitled "Dead Sea Scrolls," has this to say:

> Now it has long been recognized that paraphrasing has been practiced by New Testament writers, and there are some parallel usages in rabbinic literature, but in the Dead Sea scrolls, we find the SAME PRACTICE AND METHOD (my caps) used time and time again, and there is no hermeneutic principle of interpretation in the New Testament which cannot be exactly matched in Qumran literature. . . .

To understand what "hermeneutic" principles of Biblical interpretation signify, we must realize that under these principles, if the Hebrew text tells us that "wine is treacherous," the copyist of this text, if it suits his whim or his doctrine, takes the liberty of changing this to read "wealth is treacherous," basing his change on the resemblance of the word meaning "wine" in Hebrew (namely, "hyyn") to the word meaning "wealth" in Hebrew (viz., "hwn"). After all, don't you see, this alteration of the text only involves an itty bitty minor change in spelling; so, come now, is it not practically the same thing?

Or are the "hermeneutic" principles of interpretation used habitually by Bible copyists of old, from our standpoint at least, merely a chaotic lack of honest principle? The fact is—to put it plainly—that the scribes who used such hermeneutic principles of interpretation were not only inaccurate, but unprincipled, irresponsible, and sometimes dishonest.

John M. Allegro, to his great credit, has recognized the similarity of this reprehensible practice in Matthew and in the Dead Sea scrolls. He points out further:

> There are some very good examples in the Habukkuk Commentary of the writer deliberately altering his text to suit his own interpretation. . . .

The examples which he cites are "very good" examples of a very bad practice, as the reader might declare in a similar way, that murder and mayhem are "good" examples of crimes of violence.

In his commentary on the Old Testament book, Habukkuk, a Qumran scribe actually alters "hyyn" (in Hab. 2: 5) to "hwn," changing the meaning of the passage entirely, but making the passage agree with "what he wanted to say about the greed of the 'Wicked Priest' in contrast to the avowed poverty of the Sect" (Allegro). Again, in Habukkuk 1: 13, the Qumran commentator changes the Hebrew singular "look thou" to the plural form "look ye," making the passage apply to a renegade element of the sect, called the House of Absalom, asking them why they stood by when the Teacher of Righteousness suffered, although the original Habukkuk text is obviously addressed to God.

The Qumran commentator-scribe apparently felt that the affairs of the sect had to be foreshadowed in sacred scripture, just as the author of John later attempted by might and main to show that a certain passage in Exodus contained a foreshadowing of Jesus' crucifixion and death on the cross. In fact, wherever any Old Testament passage could be twisted or wrested to convey an adumbration of their own leader's persecution, the Qumran commentators were apparently determined to use it for just that purpose.

Later, early Christian writers (like the author of Matthew) were to do the same thing for Jesus. An example is always more to the point than an abstract generalization, so let us quote the text of one of the Psalms:

> Psalms 78: 2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us: we will not hide them from their children. . . .

The author of Matthew takes this passage and renders it thus:

> Matthew 13: 35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will utter things KEPT SECRET from the foundation of the world. . . .

The passage from Psalms tells us that parables are to be used to reveal wisdom LONG KNOWN, or known of old; the Matthew passage tells us that the parables of Jesus are used to reveal wisdom NEVER

BEFORE KNOWN. One passage, as we can see, is in diametric contradiction to the other.

Matthew wanted to cite "prophetic" confirmation of Jesus' use of parables, and he proceeded to twist the Psalmist's words to fit such a verification, just as he twisted Isaiah's words to make them apply to and "confirm" Jesus' PURPORTED virgin birth. We discussed this example of "paraphrasing" in Chapter Four so that there can be no mistake about its erroneous and altogether improper application to Jesus. But perhaps Matthew had to twist the Psalmist's words to make them fit Jesus' avowed purpose in his use of parables. In this connection, it might be appropriate to call the reader's attention to the following passage in the Gospel of Mark:

> Mark 4: 11-12 And he said unto them (the disciples) Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without (that is, the uninitiated, or perhaps those not "elected"), all things are done in parables, so that seeing, they may see and not perceive; and hearing, they may hear, but not understand; lest they should be converted and their sins forgiven them. . . .

In other words, apparently only God's chosen "elect" can or shall be "saved" because they alone are given the power to understand. Hardly a doctrine worthy of God. Yet here it is—in black and white—and Jesus (according to supposedly inspired Scripture) taught it himself. In this gospel passage we are told that Jesus preferred not to speak plainly for fear that those for whom salvation is not intended, nor ever was, shall "accidentally" be converted and be saved from eternal torment. This involves a highly immoral doctrine, which is certainly not worthy of Jesus, and definitely contrary to our conception of Christian ethics, and repugnant to the impartial justice we envision as an essential attribute of God.

The words above quoted that appear in the 4th Chapter of Mark, do not appear there because of scribal error either, because Paul preaches the same doctrine:

> Romans 11: 7-8 The Election (i.e., those "elected") hath obtained it, and the rest WERE BLINDED, according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear. . . . (Compare phrasing in Mark)

Again to verify still further that our manner of interpreting the passage in Mark 4: 11-12 is no mistake, we might cite another passage wherein Jesus is describing to his disciples the signs which shall precede the

END of the world, where the very same doctrine of "ELECTION" is clearly set forth:

> Mark 13: 19 For in those days shall be affliction . . . and except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the Elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, hath he shortened the days. . . .

And this is not all. The Elect are so securely protected that apparently they CANNOT be seduced or led astray, as witness:

> Mark 13: 22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise and shall show signs and wonders to seduce (or deceive) even the Elect, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE (implying that such a thing of course is not possible at all). . . .

In short, if you are not amongst the Elect, there never was a chance for you from the beginning. Repentance would not save you, nor good works, neither remorse at wrong-doing, nor even honorable or ethical living. On the other hand, if you happen to be one of the Elect—one who stands in God's grace from the foundation of the world—you will be saved REGARDLESS, whether you will or no, and saved too apparently regardless of whether you lead a life of integrity and meet the demands of the moral law in your relations with other men. You may sin, sin, sin to your heart's content if you are one of God's Elect, and apparently still stand in God's predestined grace. To portray such a philosophy as the Word of God not only slanders His name, but puts an ugly blister there.

In connection with the morally dubious theory of predestination, it is the studied opinion of Albert Schweitzer, in his "Quest of the Historical Jesus," that Jesus is portrayed in the gospel as believing (in Schweitzer's words) that

> . . . the truth which he, Jesus, offers is exclusively intended for those who have been chosen (=the Elect). . . . All that goes beyond the simple admonition ("Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand") must not be presented to the public EXCEPT IN PARABLES (my caps). . . .

This is done so that only those who have the "initial" knowledge (and I use the word "initial" in the sense of those who are initiated into the secrets of the Kingdom)—that is to say, ONLY the Elect—can rightly comprehend the parables and receive his message. This would make sense of Jesus' cryptic words: "Unto him that hath (e.g., this initial, secret or esoteric knowledge or Qumran 'light'), more shall be given." According to Mark 4: 11-12 (quoted a few pages back), the parables are INTENDED to be unintelligible except to the initiated, and the message these parables convey is deliberately hidden under wraps. The Marcan extract bears repetition:

> Mark 4: 11-12 Jesus said unto his disciples, Unto you IT IS GIVEN to know the mystery of the Kingdom . . . but unto them that are without (the uninitiated), all things are done (or spoken) in parables, that seeing, they may see and perceive not, and hearing they may hear and not understand, LEST at any time they should be converted, and their sins be forgiven them. . . .

Not a very broad or liberal plan for extending forgiveness, to be sure.

According to Albert Schweitzer's theory, Jesus was apparently fearful or jealous lest those outside the circle of the Elect should penetrate into their secrets and win grace or life eternal. Jesus apparently believed that these "secrets" were exclusively reserved for those already "predestined" by God to salvation.

We may wonder a little at such a strange belief, but the belief was a familiar one, and an accepted one amongst the members of the Dead Sea scrolls sect and probably amongst other similar esoteric groups which flourished, we may be sure, in some number in the century preceding Jesus' birth. When we reflect upon the matter, there is really no cause to wonder that Jesus, being a child of his own age and times, should naturally fall under the influence of beliefs such as this, which were widely current in his generation. Only if he had been Divine would he have been able to rise above such contemporary influences.

There is no question in my mind—if the gospels are to be trusted at all—that Jesus believed in the unfortunate and stultifying doctrine of the Elect, and in the companion doctrine that only those "elected" or chosen by God were predestined to enjoy salvation. These beliefs are clearly recorded (and ostensibly in Jesus' own words) in several gospel contexts.

I call the doctrine unfortunate and stultifying because none but those who would be saved anyway, would or could "receive" Jesus' message, according to the terms of this doctrine. No one else who heard his message could possibly be saved ("hearing, they may hear, but not understand"), so actually it was quite unnecessary for Jesus to broadcast his message in the first place. Those who were to be saved would be saved regardless whether Jesus preached or not, and his preaching could be of no avail to those already condemned—condemned too since the foundation of the world—to an eternity of torment and the obscure fires of Hell. Is it conceivable that this could be the deliberate plan of an all-loving and merciful God?

I might add however that while some of the parables are somewhat abstruse, and may reflect Jesus' mistaken notion of the imminent approach of the END of the world, and his notion too of the impending advent of the Kingdom of God on earth, most readers will probably agree with me that many of the parables are intensely clarifying and seem to serve as a device to aid the hearer's understanding rather than befuddle it. But our opinion in this respect of course flatly contradicts the gospel explanation offered by Mark and Matthew.

It could still be argued that perhaps only the Elect (those predestined by God to salvation) could rightly grasp the significance of the parables in any case. It may be that Mark (or Peter, from whom Mark supposedly had his information) was mistaken or confused about Jesus' purpose in his use of parables. You will note that I do not say that God was mistaken or confused, or deliberately deceptive, although if we were to insist that the Gospel of Mark was among the Biblical books often claimed to be the genuinely inspired or revealed Word of God, we would be compelled to place the onus for the error or confusion on God Himself. Again we see that the doctrines of the Bible's "Divine" authorship and the Bible's Divine infallibility MUST be rejected if we are to reach a rational conclusion, or if we are to avoid deeply affronting God by casting derogatory aspersions of ignorance or premeditated duplicity upon His august Name.

Chapter Six: The Forged Gospel of John

As we approach the Gospel of John, we must remind ourselves that all Bible scholars, including those committed to the "orthodox" view, detect vast and irreconcilable differences between it and the three earlier gospels.

It is very important that we understand that the differences are not merely such more or less minor ones as we discover for example when we compare the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. These three other gospels tell virtually the same story in their major aspects and general outline regarding the events in the life of Jesus, and regarding his personality and teachings, except for some demonstrably mythical additions in Matthew and Luke such as the virgin birth tales (already examined by us in Chapter Four) which are not found in Mark.

The "harmony" or general agreement of the three earlier gospels is not at all remarkable, because Bible scholars (again including "orthodox" Christian scholars) are now firmly convinced that the authors of Matthew and Luke obtained and copied the bulk of the information they present in their gospels from Mark's account.

Admittedly, three men writing independently might tell of the same events and relate the same episodes and anecdotes, etc., but it would be impossible for them to use exactly the same language, word for word, and the same punctuation (even down to parenthetical remarks) unless they copied one from another. One example is worth a thousand words, so it might be well for us to submit one typical example of the same event or episode as it is related in Mark, Matthew and Luke:

> Mark 2: 10-11 But that ye may know that the "Son of Man" hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise and take up thy bed and go thy way into thine house. . . .
>
> Matthew 9: 6-7 But that ye may know that the "Son of Man" hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. . . .
>
> Luke 5: 24 But that ye may know that the "Son of Man" hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. . . .

The verbal identity of the three parallel passages cited above (and there are many, many others) is proof positive that the authors of Matthew and Luke, or two of the three earlier gospellists, did not write about the life and teachings of Jesus FROM THEIR OWN PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE. We are not therefore, as we are led to assume, listening to three separate witnesses or testimonies of the same events, but only to one; for Matthew and Luke (or two of the three "witnesses") are merely repeating or copying down in their "testimony" what they had borrowed from Mark's account.

This leaves but one possible original witness to the events described in the gospels, namely Mark. But Bible research has already established that even this one possible original witness was not in fact an EYE-WITNESS. Mark got what information he supplies at second-hand too, presumably or conjecturally from Peter.

How accurately Mark relayed to us what Peter related to him (assuming the accuracy of our conjecture) we have of course no way of knowing. But as we have shown in an earlier chapter, much foreign matter (that is, much spurious or forged matter) must surely have been added to Mark's original composition by early copyists and scribes whose habit of adding to the text they copied is a well-established fact.

Inasmuch as no "first edition" or original copy of Mark is available either in Greek, Hebrew, or in Aramaic (Jesus' language), we cannot check what additions the EARLIER copyists made to Mark's text, although as we have seen in Chapter Five, we can trace some additions the LATER copyists made. But we can have little doubt or are justified in assuming that additions to the text were made (and perhaps more frequently) by earlier copyists as well as by the later ones. We are merely prevented from discovering these "earlier" additions by the fact that we do not possess Mark's original manuscript.

To further assure those who might entertain some doubt that the authors of Matthew and Luke did indeed get their information from Mark, an examination of the two intermediate gospels (Matthew and Luke) reveals that not only do the authors of Matthew and Luke report the same events, episodes, etc. as Mark does, and often in identical language, but in addition to this frequent word for word identity with Mark in their accounts, both Matthew and Luke report the episodes they borrowed IN THE SAME ORDER and sequence in which we find them in Mark.

Let us explain it this way, at the risk of over-simplification: both Matthew and Luke preserve almost invariably the order in which Mark presents the events of Jesus' life, even when these intermediate gospellists interrupt Mark's matter temporarily to introduce new matter of their own or information from another source. For example, assuming Mark's matter and its order of presentation to be A B C D E F; in Matthew and Luke the order (as well as the matter) is preserved thus: A z B C q D m E F and A B w z C y q D E m o F, new matter in Matthew and Luke being represented for the sake of this demonstration by smaller letters; and if occasionally some matter of Mark's is omitted it simply disappears from the order, as thus: A z B q D m E F, where the dropped "C" represents omitted Marcan matter.

If the authors of Matthew and Luke had not had Mark's account to copy from, they might indeed have narrated the same episodes, but the sequence or order of their narration of these episodes must inevitably have deviated at some point from the sequence adopted by Mark. And for a good reason.

In fact deviation from Mark's sequence must have been absolutely unavoidable, considering Papias' comment, (written in 140 A.D.):

> Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without, however, recalling IN ORDER (that is, chronological order) what was either said or done by Jesus. For neither did Mark hear the Lord nor did he follow him; but afterwards, as I said, followed Peter. . . .

This passage of Papias implies that Mark did not record the events or episodes in the chronological order in which they occurred, for the fact is that he could not very well do so, because he was not an eye-witness to the events and could not fall back on his recollection in an attempt to marshal them in their proper or approximate order of actual occurrence. But—and here is the important point—if Matthew and Luke had themselves been eye-witnesses rather than copyists, their memory and presentation of the events would have had to differ chronologically from Mark's sequence in some respect—nay, say rather in many respects—because Mark's account was admittedly inaccurate and chronologically confused. But the truth is that the authors of Matthew and Luke both record the episodes in the order and sequence which they found in Mark, which points us to the conclusion that they WERE COMPELLED to depend on Mark's account for their knowledge of these events, and followed his sequence of the events because they had no further knowledge of them except that which Mark supplied. Nor have we.

In an ancient book like the Bible, as we have indicated elsewhere, only by "indirection" can we find out the truth, and only by a careful assessment of the text and sequence of events in Mark's account can we verify, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the authors of Matthew and Luke did not write their accounts independently of Mark but copied his information and even went so far as to copy his very words and punctuation in countless instances.

The instrument that God gives us to search out truth is our reasoning faculty, and it behooves all of us not to permit this wonderful gift, this truly miraculous and divine power, to atrophy for lack of use. Shakespeare, writing at the prime of his power, cautions us:

> What is man
> If the chief use and market of his time
> Be but to feed and sleep? A beast, no more.
> Sure He that made us with such large discourse
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and God-like Reason
> To fust in us unused. . . .
> —*Hamlet, Act IV,* Sc. 4, *lines* 33-39.

As indicated above then, there is nothing remarkable in the fact that the three earlier gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke) are so similar in content, chronology, sequence and even verbal structure. One gospel is Mark, pure and simple, plus later forged additions (such as we have illustrated in Chapter Five). The second of these three gospels is Mark all over again, plus some additional parables, legends, and mythical accretions (plus of course, later forged additions). And the third gospel of this group of three is Mark again, plus legendary or mythical additions similar to those in the second gospel, and still more sayings attributed to Jesus, and again, later forged additions.

The book of John however, as we shall shortly see, not only differs from these three earlier gospel accounts, but differs so radically and so irreconcilably from them, that its version of events, its recital of Jesus' words, and its portrayal of Jesus' character and personality must be rejected as forged, and forged (as will appear) in all likelihood, or almost certainly, for the purposes of doctrinal propaganda.

What most of us do not realize is that the gospels were not all written at the same time, and that none of them were written while Jesus was still alive; nor were any of them written immediately or even shortly after his death. The EARLIEST gospel, Mark, was not itself written until several decades after Jesus' death, so that on this score as well as on others even the complete authenticity of Mark is open to question. But having said this, Mark was written some 45 years or nearly a half century before John and would be nearer by generations to the events it relates, and would assuredly on this basis alone be entitled to prior claim to authenticity over John which reports the events of Jesus' life and his words so differently.

It must be understood too at the very outset that the book of John was not written until the Second Century A.D. and can not under any circumstances be regarded as a genuine, contemporary, eye-witness or first-hand biographical account any more than and much less than the other gospels. The first three gospels were themselves not written till long past the middle of the First Century A.D. Mark's treatise (which we have dignified by calling it "gospel") appeared about 70 A.D., and Matthew and Luke about 85 to 90 A.D., but the book of John followed decades later, somewhere in the first quarter of the Second Century.

The fact is that NONE of the Gospels—as we have already seen—can be safely considered eye-witness or first-hand accounts and as for John, it is the least likely candidate for such status.

None of the gospels were written by Jesus' immediate or original disciples, and Jesus left no self-written memorial or autograph of himself or his teachings, nor was there an Associated Press to give on-the-spot coverage of events and important episodes in his life as they occurred, and he had no Boswell either to record his day to day sayings.

After Jesus died, at least 35 years passed before Mark's "gospel" was first reduced to writing—and mind you, by a non-witness.

I put it to you: could you recall with any degree of accuracy the substance, let alone the stenographically exact words spoken by your pastor just two Sundays ago? And suppose you had only heard the tenor of his words at second hand from a friend, who gave you the gist of the pastor's words as he recalled them. Now THIS, in a small way, was the actual situation of Mark.

Mark never heard Jesus preach, but Jesus' words were repeated to him by Peter, as we guess, taking Papias' word. Add to this the further fact that when Mark wrote his treatise (or "gospel") relating Jesus' words and the events of his life at second hand, it was not two Sundays after the events occurred, but GENERATIONS later. And the authors of Matthew and Luke copied from Mark, so their accounts were further generations removed.

The "gospel" of John was published still more generations afterward, and it behooves us at this point to establish once and for all that John was not in fact written until the Second Century. Otherwise it might be claimed that the gospel of John existed in some form in the First Century, but was not written down until later. Confirmation of its late composition is found in the fact that not a single one of the Church Fathers and not one of the First Century Christian writers or preachers makes any reference to the Book or Gospel of John during the entire First Century, nor to any portion of it, not even to a single text from it.

In the incredibly voluminous works, letters, etc. of early Christian writers, references are frequent to the other gospels, and there are even countless references to now discredited gospels (rejected as "forgeries"), and innumerable references to the apocryphal Biblical "books" (which church leaders and councils "decided" were not God's Word and which they therefore excluded from the canon), but nary a word about John, nary a quotation from John, nary an allusion to any verse in John.

It is evident that if the gospel of John had existed in its present form or in any older form during the First Century, it would have been quoted or alluded to by someone, somewhere in the First Century, especially since it was presumably written by one of Jesus' own disciples, and would therefore command the highest respect and greatest authority in the early Church. The monumental and excellent "Interpreter's Bible" (the composite work of a group of Twentieth Century orthodox Christian scholars) makes the following significant comment in this connection:

> One of the chief difficulties in the way of accepting the claim that the Apostle John was the author of John is that we should have expected a Gospel claiming so high an Apostolic authority to have been MORE WIDELY KNOWN AND QUOTED MUCH EARLIER (my caps) than seems to have been the case. . . .
>
> —*Interpreter's Bible,* Volume *VIII,* p. 440.

What we have been saying in the foregoing paragraphs merely serves to corroborate the firm conclusion reached on still other grounds by Bible research students that the book of John was definitely a "product" of the Second Century. It was apparently written, not as an authentic biography of Jesus, but one might say more by way of theological propaganda, incorporating in its text the turn that Christian doctrinal thought had taken from the time of Jesus' death to that era.

Unfortunately because of its place in the Bible, standing as it does next to the other three gospels which all pretend to be true biographies of Jesus, the Bible reader is led to believe that the Gospel of John is also "another" true history of Jesus' life, WHICH IT IS NOT. It is doctrinal theology, propaganda in its purest form, which alters and twists Jesus' words and the events of his life to support its ideology, as we shall presently see.

The Gospel of John was created (or forged) in its entirety with apparently one important purpose in mind. This purpose was certainly not to ascertain the truth about Jesus, namely whether Jesus was more than human, nor yet to accurately present the events of his life, but was rather to MANUFACTURE EVIDENCE to "prove" that Jesus was actually a mystical, quasi-divine being descended from Heaven, and to preach that "belief" in him would result in the "salvation" of the believer.

To accomplish his purpose, the unknown author of John felt no compunction in putting spurious (forged) words into Jesus' mouth, and no remorse at twisting events to give them a new mystical significance that would support and "verify" doctrines of the Second Century Christian Church, which had now come a long way along the path in making Christianity the religion "about" Jesus, rather than the religion "of" Jesus.

For now in John we see that salvation is attainable not as the Jesus of Mark, Matthew and Luke taught, viz., by high ethical living and the practice of good will, or by observing certain specific commandments of love, etc., but is now (according to John) only to be attained by BELIEF IN JESUS as the Son of God. If you confessed or professed belief in Jesus' NAME or "office" (that is, his Messiahship) you were "saved." If you did not—apparently no matter how meritorious your life, no matter how pure your heart—you were eternally damned. A strange and malicious corruption of the religious teachings of Jesus indeed!

But this is ever the course of evolution followed by all world religions. Buddha exclaimed against ritual worship of the gods of his people, yet after his death his followers made Buddha himself an object of ritual worship and Buddhism hardened into the very ritualism and formalism Buddha had decried in his lifetime.

So with Jesus, whose purpose was to teach not a new way of worship, but a new way of living; and so too with Christianity (the religion we name after Jesus in his purported office denoted by the Jewish word, "Messiah," which the Greeks translated into "Christos") for instead of Christianity following the clear ethical teachings of Jesus, it became highly formalized, dogmatized and ritualized, and promised salvation to those who but merely confessed belief in Jesus' name or acknowledged his Sonship to God.

Christianity in its new formal and dogmatic attire, promised salvation only to those who were duly baptized, whether immersed or just lightly sprinkled, (and woe to him who was not!) and later required believers to observe certain other "sacraments" or rites established by the Church authorities to insure (as they said) Heaven's favor. So too it came to be considered a "pious" virtue to tithe faithfully, and to repeat set prayers in great numbers, observe the Sabbath, and more lately, just to read the Bible daily was become the sign of a good and religious person.

But alas, as Jesus himself taught, all these formal aspects of religion are but the "outside of the cup." Genuine religion consists of the inward principles by which we guide our adult lives, the kindnesses we show our fellows, the appreciation we joyfully (to the point of tears) and often in silence express to God for his bounties, the patience, tolerance and humility we display in our every-day lives, the remorse we feel for our failures to attain nobility and perfect integrity.

Would Jesus, think you, rather have a man observe every punctilio, rite and sacrament prescribed by the Christian Church, or practice noble kindness? To ask such a question is to answer it. Is it not recorded that Jesus himself severely rebuked the established Church of his own day because it had lost sight of the true essence of religious worship?

And should not the established Church of today be perhaps reminded that the essential quality of worship does not reside in outward ritual, nor can worship therefore be truly achieved in church attendance, participation in church sacraments, observing church holidays, or in tithing, public prayer, fasting, and so on? Worship is rather something that comes—if it comes at all—from the inmost chambers of the brain, heart, and soul and moves lovingly toward all things.

Worship is essentially an inward climate or posture, a loving attitude that will naturally express itself in acts of good will, honor and patience. It is an "internal" attitude which should not, I submit, be maintained only on one particular day of the week, but on all days; and not in one particular place but in all places. Nor should we be misled to consider that one particular posture of the body or hands is more "religious" or more expressive of piety than any other posture. It is rather the "posture" of the heart and mind that is all-important in religion. Jesus' constant emphasis on the "inwardness" of religion is everywhere apparent in his recorded teachings and it is a fact beyond challenge.

To return to our examination of the Gospel of John, the importance of establishing its biographical authenticity or its lack of biographical authenticity cannot be over-emphasized. How important such a determination can be is suggested by J. R. Sizoo in his illuminating book entitled "I Believe in the Bible":

> No book ever written by man has been so critically studied as the Gospel of John. . . . This Gospel makes gigantic claims for Jesus and IF THE BOOK CAN BE DISCREDITED (my caps), these claims fail. . . .

The discrepancies and contrasts between the gospel account found in John and the account given by the other three, earlier gospels are indeed legion and irreconcilable, and we must face squarely up to the fact that it is necessary for us either to accept the three earlier gospels as broadly authentic and reject John as spurious, or vice versa. And no accredited Bible scholar, I venture to say, would suggest a sweeping rejection of Mark, Matthew and Luke, which leaves no alternative but to reject John.

Jabez T. Sunderland, commenting on the manifold discrepancies between John and the other gospels, in his scholarly "Origin and Character of the Bible," presents the dilemma most succinctly:

> So very marked and significant are the contrasts between the first three Gospels and the Fourth (John), that if the former three are to be taken as giving in the main A TRUE PICTURE (my caps), the latter (John) can neither be historical nor the production of an eye-witness. . . .

In other words, if we accept the first three Gospels as biographically authentic, historically accurate or genuinely true, insofar as they narrate the events in the life of Jesus or give his actual words or reveal his personality and character, then we must of necessity—by the sheer demands of logic and to avoid absurdity—consider the report given in John as FICTITIOUS, which is to say, forged.

All true literature is largely fictitious, being "forged" in the sense that it is manufactured out of materials in some author's imagination and brain. No reprehension however is intended to attach to the word "forged" when applied to fictional literature as such, which does not seriously pretend to be other than it is, even when such literature assumes an historical setting.

But when a "fictional" work is in all seriousness claimed to be absolutely sober truth, or is held forth to us as a serious description of authentic biographical or historic reality, or is passed off as genuine fact—and solemnly attested as true outside the world of make-believe, then such a fictional work must be considered deliberate "forgery" in a culpable sense.

The book of John clearly lends itself to the pretence that it is a true biography of Jesus, his life and his words, whereas actually it is neither an accurate account of the events in his life, nor does it contain an authentic record of his words; nor yet does it give a genuine picture of his personality.

By a careful comparison with the other three gospels, we discover in John that the events of Jesus' life are distorted and that fictitious words (words foreign to his very character and personality) are deliberately forged and put into Jesus' mouth. In addition, the anonymous author of John is so conscious of his villainous fakery that he deliberately pretends that not he, but an EYE-WITNESS, wrote the book.

Because of its placement in the Bible alongside the other three gospels, there is an implied claim on behalf of the book of John that it is entitled to equal consideration with them as an authentic "gospel" whereas the truth is, it is not.

If the whole truth were known, perhaps none of the gospels would be entitled to our conscientious consideration as completely authentic. But despite the many legendary and miraculous elements or accretions in the three earlier gospels, which make belief in their total authenticity difficult, these three gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke still reveal—in a very definite and credible way—the personality of a man and the noble trend of his thoughts, AS WELL AS his shortcomings and limitations alluded to in Chapter One.

In the first three gospels, Jesus' message, if we may be permitted to so describe it, comes through to us but imperfectly. What he said or did not say is sometimes difficult, if not impossible to ascertain or separate, but from the few broken fragments which tradition has happily preserved for us, we are still able to piece together the basic pattern of his thought. We see in these three earlier gospels at least more than a glimpse of the hem of his garment, which is all that in a sense is deigned to us in John.

The broken mosaic we have before us, gleaned from Mark, Matthew and Luke, reveals certain fundamental ideas and beliefs which activated and undergirded Jesus' teaching. For one thing we know that he believed and taught that man's highest religious duties were (1) to love God and (2) to love his fellow-man.

His indifference to established religious tradition when it interfered with the practice of mercy or had no essential moral validity; his severe condemnation of self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and pretence in religious worship; his disbelief in the intrinsic merit of observing religious ritual from which the spirit of love, justice and good will are absent; his suggestion of the Golden Rule as a practical guide for daily living; his spirit of infinite forgiveness; his counsel to maintain a loving attitude even toward our "enemies"; his deep sympathy for the unfortunate, the poor and the sick;—all these shine forth from the badly fragmented, time-marked, and man-marred mosaic.

There are indeed some dark and unlovely squares in this gospel mosaic of Jesus and I would not be entirely honest if I were to speak only of the beautiful and shining pieces, but there is nevertheless a strong temptation to indulge in "hero-worship" and simply forget about these "dark" squares, particularly where Jesus is concerned, and many men have understandably succumbed to this temptation.

There is however no gainsaying—no denying—that Jesus was subject to many of the ignorant beliefs of his times. His belief in demoniac possession and exorcism, to which we have already alluded several times, is a case in point. The belief too that he shared with many of his contemporaries, notably the members of the Dead Sea Scrolls sect and probably other similar groups, that the END of the world was imminent is another case in point.

And he harbored many other beliefs, for example the belief in the coming of a Messiah, a belief which it seems he shared with the majority of his countrymen, and the further belief that he was himself "that prophet," the Messias, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, or the "Son of Man" of Daniel's vision, which the "prophets" had foretold would come (in connection with this belief we might mention his firm belief that John the Baptist was Elijah returned from the dead); then also his belief that establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth was close AT HAND; and his further conviction that he would shortly return "in the clouds" to re-greet the members of his own generation.

We might also mention perhaps his belief in the existence of a Prince of Evil (alias Satan) and other lesser devils (a belief which his Semitic ancestors no doubt derived from the religions of the East, and which they might conceivably have brought back with them upon their return from their "Babylonian Captivity": they certainly had no belief in a "Devil" prior to the Captivity—which is borne out by the fact that there is no mention of the Devil in the Old Testament until AFTER the Return; his belief that God had prepared a place of everlasting punishment and torment in quenchless fire for the wicked or those not "chosen" (=elected) by God to share eternal bliss; and this very belief in "the Elect" who alone were destined from the foundation of the world to be saved.

Truly and truly there are too many unlovely squares in the broken mosaic of Jesus' portrait in the gospels. But we measure a man not by the limitations he shares with men of his times, but by the manner in which he succeeds in rising above such limitations. Judged thus, Jesus towers like a Colossus and casts his shadow along the ages.

It must be understood that our estimate of the man (and I say "man" deliberately) is not lessened either by the fact that we now know that much of his teaching was not original with him, but was largely borrowed from the Old Testament. A single quick example will serve to corroborate this point, though many more instances could be cited. In Mark 12: 29-31 we read:

> And Jesus answered: The first (=principal) of all commandments is: Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is ONE Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength . . . and the second (commandment) is this. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. . . .

Let us now turn to the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament:

> Lev. 19: 18 . . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. . . .

> Deut. 6: 45 Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is ONE Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might. . . .

Word for identical word, Jesus' statement of the two principal commandments is taken from the Old Testament and yet this teaching is by many considered one of the cornerstones of his vital "message," if not its very taproot.

I repeat, our estimate of Jesus is not or should not be diminished, even when we realize that his teachings are NOT derived from his own original or creative thinking, but are seen to be rather the end-result or outgrowth of centuries of evolution from the total teachings of Judaism. To his glory and credit, Jesus took the old words, the old ethics, the old teachings and gave them a new emphasis, sometimes a new dress and often a new direction, and certainly their highest expression.

To make his gospel forgery more credible, the author of John resorts to a dramatic device and proceeds to make it appear that he is reporting the actual words of Jesus. If he had intended to be strictly honest, he could have stated frankly that he was outlining what Christians of the Second Century believed about Jesus and would therefore have declared, for example, that Christians of his day believed that Jesus was "the door" to life, or that those who followed Jesus thought of him as "the way" (that is, the way to salvation), always speaking of Jesus in the third person, the grammatical relation or mode of speech we ordinarily use when talking about a third person.

Instead, the fabricator of John makes Jesus speak in the first person, viz., "I am the Door," "I am the Way," "I am the Light of the World," "Before Abraham, I am," as if he were quoting Jesus' exact words. Jesus is the forger's puppet his Punchinello, his Charlie McCarthy, and the puppet's lips move as the anonymous author of John pulls the strings or works the pulleys.

It is NOT actually Jesus who speaks, but the unknown author of John masquerading under the name of the Apostle John and wearing his flowing mantle. But the ventriloquism is done with such consummate skill, that we are led to believe it is Jesus who speaks, just as we are led to believe that it is Charlie McCarthy who is talking, and forget that it is really Mr. Bergen who does the talking, when we watch and listen to the delightful Charlie McCarthy.

The truth is that the dummy does not speak, but only appears to. Just so in the Gospel of John, it is not Jesus who speaks, but John, and not even John, but one who wears the mask of John.

In John, moreover, the historic Jesus is etherealized and his thoughts "doctrinized" and as a consequence he becomes vaguely unreal. He is no longer a man whose thoughts and problems we can even distantly understand, and whom we can take warmly to our hearts.

It must be confessed however that the author of John is not the only gospel writer who is at fault in this respect, because what we may call the "dehumanization" of Jesus had been already begun to a very appreciable degree in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

The authors of these intermediate gospels were frequently tempted to hide or gloss over some of the human qualities and human traits that Jesus exhibited in Mark's account, which they deliberately altered as they copied Mark's recital of events into their own written account of these events.

For example, as we have indicated previously, there is absolutely no hint in Mark (the earliest gospel) that Jesus was born in a manner other than that in which we today expect all men to be born. Even in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, his HUMAN lineage or genealogical descent is clearly (though divergently) set forth.

However, in both these intermediate gospels a breach can already be observed in the humanity with which Jesus is more securely hedged about in Mark, for both of these later "biographies," besides providing a human genealogy for Jesus ALSO tell a story of his birth in which the "Holy Ghost" (a newly invented Divine entity) and a "virgin" are purportedly involved. This is a definite step in the direction of Jesus' dehumanization which the author of John achieves even more completely by de-emphasizing Jesus' birth and by hinting that Jesus "descended" from Heaven or from "above." Again, whereas Mark (15: 34) clearly relates human despair, human bitterness, and human disappointment in the dying words of Jesus which he reports ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"), in Luke these words are deliberately omitted, probably because Luke felt that while such words might be appropriate to a human mortal dying on the cross, they might be considered unbecoming or inconsistent with the divine nature he vaguely envisioned as belonging to Jesus, and which he was attempting to convey to his auditors.

The author of Matthew, not as discerning as Luke, or missing the damaging implications of the dying words reported by Mark, merely repeats Mark's account:

> Matt. 27: 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

This of course is copied WORD FOR WORD from Mark and serves as another example of the verbal identity mentioned earlier in this Chapter:

> Mark 15: 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which is, being interpreted, My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?

Luke, as I say, omits these words, which would betray Jesus' humanity, and instead substitutes some new words of calm (and "godlike") resignation:

> Luke 23: 46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. . . .

Still other "dying words" for which Luke is not responsible though they appear in his gospel were forged in a later century (as we have reported in Chapter Five), and were interpolated or surreptitiously inserted into the text of Luke, namely:

> Luke 23: 34 Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. . . .

This verse does NOT appear in the oldest extant manuscripts of Luke, being added centuries after the gospel was originally written, to further "dehumanize" Jesus. But Luke's own account dehumanizes Jesus to the extent that the very human emotions displayed in Jesus' dying words in Mark are not chronicled by him, nor does he record Jesus' momentary loss of faith in God implied in these words.

The above examples are intended to illustrate some of the methods used by Matthew and Luke deliberately (or perhaps sometimes without conscious purpose) to deprive Jesus of his human characteristics and human nature. Another example is the complete omission on the part of both Matthew and Luke of the incident in which Jesus "curses" the fig-tree. We read in Mark:

> Mark 11: 12-14 And on the morrow when they were come from Bethany, Jesus was hungry and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time (season) of figs was not yet. And Jesus said unto it, no man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it (the curse). . . .

Jesus' unreasonable and impatient anger at a tree whose season to bear fruit is established by God's mysterious calendar, is altogether human and demonstrates that Jesus possessed the same sort of mental "blind spots" common to all who share the human lot. In this Marcan passage we find him guilty of a petty resentment and unreasoning impatience of which no divine being could conceivably be capable.

The above episode quoted from Mark shows Jesus in a poor light indeed and shows too that his feet were made of the same clayey substance as ours, for which reason the two intermediate gospellists, upon reflection, evidently thought best to leave it out of their accounts altogether, thus again dehumanizing Jesus to the extent of concealing from their readers such strictly "human" traits.

Unfortunately, even Mark is not satisfied just to report the incident for what it is worth (a la Boswell), but overlards it with "miracle" by adding:

> Mark 11: 20 In the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. . . .

By citing this "miracle" of destruction, Mark apparently hoped to illustrate the power of faith. But faith, I think you will agree, should not and cannot be thus employed to sate petty revenge and too upon that which is wholly innocent of moral or other wrong. Were we indeed able to use faith to such base, petty and vicious ends, we might easily lose faith in the power of faith.

Seeing that the repetition of this passage would add nothing to Jesus' stature, and might indeed be a source of detraction, both Matthew and Luke omitted it from their accounts.

Still another method by which the authors of the gospels progressively divested Jesus of his human qualities is excellently illustrated by the manner in which they retold some perfectly natural incidents reported by Mark. In retelling these ordinary events, they added something "miraculous" to their own narration of these episodes.

For example—and as I have said before, one example is worth a thousand words—Mark reports that Jesus merely asked Peter and Andrew his brother, and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) to leave their nets and "follow" him; but Luke, writing his account several generations later, introduces the miraculous draught of fishes in telling of the same event and hints that this "miracle" (NOT reported mind you, by Mark—or Matthew) served to help persuade this group of astonished fisher-folk to become disciples of Jesus.

Later on, the author of John carried the dehumanization process thus started by Luke in connection with this event STILL FURTHER by telling us that it was a "ghostly" Jesus who performed the miracle. The miracle was in the first place added to the anecdote by Luke when he copied Mark's account of the anecdote; but in John's version, it is a "risen" Jesus (we are assured by this master forger and propagandist) who performed the miracle of the great draught of fishes.

Again, in the arrest of Jesus, Mark (as well as Matthew) merely reports that one of Jesus' followers, in an attempt to defend Jesus from the arresting officers, drew his sword and—in the scuffle and melee—cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. When Luke retells the story of the arrest (and bear in mind that Luke was not a disciple, nor an eye-witness to the incident) the same event is duly described, but Luke now narrates that a miracle occurred in connection with the incident, by relating that Jesus touched the severed ear and healed it (Luke 22: 51).

In connection with this remarkable episode involving Jesus' arrest, we might well wonder in passing why dedicated "men of peace" like the disciples of Jesus should carry swords at all; but assuming that they did indeed carry swords, to meet occasions of peaceful necessity, we might again wonder whether they considered such violent action as wielding them to lop off an ear an example of "turning the other cheek" which their Master taught.

In any case, the constant heightening of the miraculous element in episodes involving Jesus, and the simultaneous elimination of Jesus' human traits in such episodes (which we have several times illustrated in the foregoing paragraphs), certainly tended to make Jesus appear less and less human, and more and more "other-worldly"; and when we find Jesus completely dehumanized in the doctrinal propaganda treatise known to us as the Gospel of John, we should not hold the author of John wholly responsible for Jesus' transformation from the more or less human figure in Mark, into the "entity" of vague unreality we find in John.

The truth is that the author of John was merely following the pattern carefully laid out for him by his predecessors in the field of Jesus' "biography." All that can be said of him is that he not only followed the nefarious practice they initiated, but that he far outstripped his preceptors.

Matthew and Luke, apparently in pious wish to impress their readers with awe and wonder, could not resist the impulse to add to Mark's simple narration of certain events the startling element of miracle. Today we are not much impressed by the miracles reported by these anonymous gospel writers. After all, anyone can attest to a miracle that cannot be verified.

Furthermore, today we realize too that the entire Cosmos is a miracle—a something to be "admired" and wondered at, that exceeds the rich powers of comprehension that Nature has given us. We see too that everything about us has in it the quality of miracle in a very lively sense, and bespeaks (viz., is evidence for) the existence of a vast or if you will, "divine" Intelligence. The so-called "miracles" we read of in the Bible pale before the tremendous miracles which our systematic investigation of Nature now daily reveals.

It is our good fortune that we are able to trace, in the illustrations of the dehumanization of Jesus cited above where the miracles reported by the later gospellists obviously were conceived, viz., in the milieu of the imagination. The purported miracle of virgin birth which again was NOT reported in Mark's earlier account of Jesus' life, but which Matthew and Luke added to their later biographical accounts, had a similar fanciful origin, a fact which is corroborated by our other findings in Chapter Four.

Another subtle method by which Matthew and Luke (prior to the fruition of the process in John) dehumanized Jesus may be illustrated by comparing the following passage from Mark with the corresponding passage in Matthew:

> Mark 6: 5 And Jesus could there (that is, in his own native region) do no mighty work. . . .
>
> Matthew 13: 58 and Jesus did not many mighty works there. . . .

In Mark we are told Jesus COULD NOT do ANY mighty work. Matthew tones this down by saying Jesus DID NOT (that is to say, could, but simply didn't) do "MANY" mighty works, signifying (1) that it wasn't a case of his being powerless or incapable of doing such "mighty" works; he just did not, as a matter of fact, do the mighty works; and (2) it wasn't a case of being unable to do "any" mighty work, he just didn't do "many" (implying he did do some).

Matthew removes the implication of a lack or absence of power on Jesus' part, and intimates by a change of phraseology that Jesus did actually perform some "mighty works" after all, contradicting Mark's account where we are plainly told that Jesus was unable to accomplish any mighty work.

Few persons just reading through the four gospels can adequately realize what gulfs apart the "Jesus" of John and the "Jesus" of the other three gospels are. A careful study of the gospels, verse by verse, and episode by episode, and a careful comparison of their divergent narration of parallel events is needful to give us a glimpse of the different portraits of Jesus painted by John on the one hand, and Mark, Matthew and Luke on the other.

Perhaps we can aid the reader who has not had the opportunity or the time to make such a study or comparison, by bringing certain salient features in the varying portraits to his attention.

To begin with, as we have already pointed out earlier in this Chapter, the author of John carefully de-emphasizes Jesus' human birth by avoiding ANY narration of its process. There is no hint of his miraculous "virgin" birth either, which of course would necessarily have to involve a "human" mother in its attainment.

It appears that the author of John had "dehumanized" Jesus to such an extent in his own mind that he could not brook even the mention in his account of a "human" mother for Jesus. Instead, in John, we are told time and time again that Jesus "descended" from Heaven or from "above."

Jesus himself is made to "declare" over and over his deep awareness of this fact—and we might note here that his purported "descent" from Heaven and his awareness of this purported fact, is nowhere mentioned in the three other, earlier gospels. Let us listen to the author of John:

> John 3: 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but HE THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, even the "Son of Man" (as you will recall, "Son of Man" was Jesus' adopted title, adopted by Jesus because he thought it was his mission to fulfil the role of the "Son of Man" of Daniel's prophecy).

This passage, incidentally, contradicts the passage in 2 Kings 2: 11 where we are told that Elijah went up into Heaven too. If we insist on the Bible's inspiration either God could be confused or his "inspired" agents could not be trusted to report his "revelations" accurately, because here we are told "no man hath ascended up to heaven" yet in the Kings passage we are clearly told Elijah ascended up to Heaven.

Again we turn to John:

> John 3: 31 He THAT COMETH FROM "ABOVE" is above all . . . (twice repeated).

> John 6: 33 The bread of God is he WHICH COMETH DOWN FROM HEAVEN. . . .

> John 6: 38 (Here Jesus is speaking via the ventriloquism of the author of John) For I CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. . . .

Again, when "the Jews" asked Jesus, in John 6: 42:

> Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then he saith "I COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN?"

Jesus is not made to answer this simple question, except by evasion:

> John 6: 43 Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, "Murmur not among yourselves. . . ."

Evidently the author of John had put the question to himself and could find no satisfactory answer to this lingering doubt in his own mind regarding Jesus' "descent" and in attempting to resolve his own doubt he has no better answer than to put the question aside with evasive irrelevance. Others would ask, and John had to provide some "answer." Certainly had the question been put to the "real" Jesus, he would have provided a simple and a direct answer, and would not have brushed it aside, with what might be called the arrogant air of a superior who does not feel called upon to answer every question put to him by his inferiors, however fair the question.

Again:

> John 8: 23 Ye are from beneath: I am FROM ABOVE. . . . Ye are of this world, I am NOT OF THIS WORLD. . . .

Another divergent point in John that we would call to the reader's attention is that Jesus is in this gospel portrayed as having existed from the "beginning" of time. The first bit of forged testimony of his "pre-existence" (that is, his existence prior to his descent from Heaven or prior to his "human" appearance) is put into the mouth of John the Baptist.

If Jesus is conceived as the unknown author's Charlie McCarthy, the Baptist is his Mortimer Snurd—if we may extend the metaphor previously adopted, to express in modern parable intelligible to all, the function of the author of John in the matter. John the Baptist is made to say:

> John 1: 15 (repeated in John 1: 30): Jesus is preferred before me, because HE EXISTED BEFORE ME. . . .

Jesus, on the author's other knee, is called upon to add his ventriloquized testimony too:

> John 8: 58 Before Abraham was, I am. . . .

And the author too, not to be outdone by his "props," adds his own testimony at the very beginning of his forged gospel:

> John 1: 1 In the beginning was the Word (that is, the LOGOS =Jesus), and the Word (=Jesus) was with God and the Word (=Jesus) was God. . . .

To interpret this, this is what we are told in the above verse: (1) Jesus existed from the Beginning; (2) Jesus was with God from the Beginning; and (3) Jesus IS God. No such claims, that Jesus existed before his birth or that Jesus was God, are made on Jesus' behalf in the other three, earlier gospels.

There can be no doubt that this was the author's meaning, because it is confirmed not only in John 1: 15 (and John 1: 30), as well as John 8: 58 (above quoted, where we are told that "Jesus" declared that he had existed BEFORE Abraham), but is also corroborated by another purported declaration of Jesus in John:

> John 10: 30: I and the Father are ONE. . . .

In Chapter One however we quoted for the reader a passage in Mark in which Jesus clearly denies that he is God, thus directly contradicting John 10: 30, and contradicting the implications of John 1: 1 (where we are told that the "Logos" or Jesus was God Himself).

> Mark 10: 17-18 and Jesus said unto him, why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God. . . .

Thus in one gospel and that the very earliest, we are assured apparently by Jesus' own testimony that he is NOT God, but in the Fourth gospel, written in the Second Century A.D., we are now assured again apparently by Jesus that he IS God. Manifestly one account must be authentic and one deliberately falsified, for obviously Jesus could not have made both statements.

This is the sort of thing that Jabez T. Sunderland probably has reference to when he declares (all caps are mine):

> The COMPLETE DIFFERENCE between the Fourth Gospel and the others is the chief reason why scholars have increasingly found it IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE that it could have been written by one of Jesus' own disciples and are disposed to regard it as the PRODUCTION OF A LATER TIME when the simple humanity of Jesus had become exalted into something superhuman. . . .
>
> —*Origin and Character of the Bible.*

If we are to choose between the two contradictory statements, one denying Jesus' divinity and the other asserting it, would it not seem John's which was written so many more generations after Jesus' death? more likely that Mark's earlier account is more to be trusted than Where, after the lapse of half a century or more, could the writer of John have found a record of words supposedly said by Jesus, which no other Christian in the First Century refers to or apparently had any knowledge of? The reader will find still more reasons for disbelieving John's account as we proceed.

As we have previously indicated, and as J. T. Sunderland in the quotation above suggests, Jesus in the gospel of John is no longer the very "human" being he was in Mark, Matthew, and Luke; instead, he is now a strange, superhuman, divine or quasi-divine and mysterious being who (we are told again and again) descended into the world from "above."

Also, the unknown author of John has somehow identified Jesus in his mind with the "LOGOS." The Logos is a word, concept or "entity" borrowed from Greek philosophy, which, when translated into English, becomes "the Word" in John 1: 1. And the Word, we are assured, was "made flesh" in Jesus.

The Logos, starting out as an abstract concept in Greek philosophical writings, now is made to take on the shape of a human being and that person (the author of John tells us) is Jesus. No where in the other three, earlier gospels is the "Logos" or "the Word made flesh" even mentioned.

No where do the authors of Mark, Matthew or Luke propound, or hint at such an abstract, air-drawn, philosophically erudite theory about Jesus' nature. Nor does Jesus, in his recorded sayings in the earlier gospels, sanction or mention such a theory (any more than he propounded the theory of "atonement").

The idea of the Logos is an entirely new one with the author of John, who was apparently steeped to some degree in Greek philosophy. His use of the word "logos" to portray or represent Jesus may have been an attempt on his part to present Jesus to the educated Greek world in their own terms or at least in terms that would have a familiar sound to them.

Just so, no doubt, the notion of Jesus as a "sacrificial lamb" made his presentation to the less learned "pagan" world easier because it had a familiar ring to the members of this vast audience: they might not be capable of comprehending Jesus' teaching that religious worship is not achieved by performing outward ritual but that religion derives rather from an inward attitude of love, but they could readily understand when they were told that Jesus' death was a "sacrificial" offering, and that they must be washed in his blood to be purified, because they were familiar with pagan animal sacrifices and familiar with the pagan rite of being "washed" in the blood of sacrificial lambs, bullocks, and the like. On such "semantic" straws is theology often built.

What was once a word ("logos") in Greek abstract or speculative philosophy (a word invented merely as a philosophic symbol), in John is given limbs and a face and the masterful forger of the gospel of John tells us that this word "logos" has been incarnated or "made flesh" in Jesus. This procedure on the part of the author of John reminds us forcibly of the T-V "commercials" where a bottle of cleaner or toothpaste suddenly sprouts arms and legs and a face and goes through the convolutions of a "humanized" dancing doll.

The point of course is that, with John, Jesus has been thoroughly de-humanized, his body drained of all human blood and all human attributes, and his person transmuted into a veritable abstraction—the "logos"—which can mean anything you want it to mean, or may signify nothing at all and be mere jargon.

The Alexandrian Jew, Philo, who popularized the term "logos" in the First Century, used it some 1300 times in his writings, IN A GREAT DIVERSITY OF MEANINGS. In his writings it can be interpreted to denote a multitude of different things. For example, in one of the 1300-odd places where he uses the word, it signifies the "living stream." This might call to the mind of some a passage in John (which may or may not indicate that the author of John was acquainted with Philo's works):

> John 4: 5 Then cometh Jesus to a city . . . called Sychar . . . now, Jacob's well was there. . . . There cometh a woman to draw water and Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. . . . Then saith the woman How is it that thou, a Jew, askest drink of me which am a woman of Samaria? . . . Jesus answered . . . if thou knewest who it is that saith, give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked instead of him and he would have given thee LIVING WATER (my caps). . . .

This use of "logos" in the sense of "living stream" is but one of the many different meanings in which Philo used the word. And any word which is asked to bear the burden of too many diverse significations, or which assumes by usage too many different meanings in the popular mind, is fated to lose clarity and become too ambiguous to be useful, unless it is clearly defined each time it is used, so that all may know in what sense it is to be understood.

In the Fourth Gospel we learn right off several things about the "logos" as the author of John conceived it:

> John 1: 1 In the beginning was the "logos," and the "logos" was with God and the "logos" was God. . . .

Let us try to unravel the meaning of this cryptic sentence, using the last equation viz., "the logos was God," which clearly equates or identifies the logos with God: that is to say, the logos and God are one and the same. Substituting the meaning of the word "logos" which we have now arrived at, in the full passage, we now have:

> John 1: 1 In the beginning was God, and God was with God and God was God. . . .

This tells us exactly nothing. Rendered thus, it is jargon or nonsense, for all we have is the incomprehensible statement "God was with God" or the fatuous expression "God was God." The verse is however generally expounded by saying that the author of John intends to equate the "logos" with Jesus (for John 1: 14 tells us that "the logos was made flesh and dwelt among us").

Using this meaning (that is to say, assuming that "Jesus" is the "logos") we now read:

> John 1: 1 In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. . . .

But if "Jesus" is "God," we are no better off than we were before, except that we are more deeply puzzled because in John 1: 14 Jesus or the "logos" is referred to as "the only begotten of God," whereas we have already been told the "logos" is God. One thing is clear and that is that the author of John is confused. To him the "logos" is not a man, nor even the Son of God, but God Himself, according to John 1: 1; yet in John 1: 14, the "logos" is "the only begotten" of God. Further on the author of John reverses himself again, recurring to his identification of the "logos" (=Jesus) with God, by having Jesus declare:

John 10: 30 I and the Father are ONE. . . .

To illustrate the author's confusion and unreliability, in still another passage he denies or contradicts this "equating" of God and Jesus, when he has Jesus declare:

John 14: 28 For my Father (that is, God) is greater than I. . . .

Who can be greater than "himself?"

But who can say with certainty what the author of John meant by "logos?" When the King James version of the Bible was being prepared, the scholars translated the Greek word "logos" by the English term "Word." From this instance alone, one can see how inadequate and inaccurate translation from one language into another can be.

When Goethe attempted to translate "John" into German, he frankly confessed that he could find no adequate or felicitous equivalent for the word "logos" in the German language. Latin translators tried several different words to convey the meaning of "logos," but none with any great success. In any case, it prompts the realization that we ourselves have no sure ground that we can stand upon, and say with assurance, "this is what the author of John meant."

But not only has Jesus been stripped of his humanity in John, he has also been dispossessed of the highly distinctive manner of expression revealed to us in his teachings as they are reported in the first gospel and in the two intermediate gospels.

In John the thoughts of Jesus are expressed in long, metaphysical, argumentative discourses and allegories that fly in wide mystic circles over our head. Not so in Mark, Matthew and Luke. There his thoughts find expression usually in short pithy sentences, easily remembered and easily understood.

Jesus' most characteristic method of teaching in the three earlier gospels was the parable, bringing his instruction from out of the vague abstract into the solid concrete of everyday life.

Perhaps Jesus instinctively glimpsed a profound truth, although he never expressed it, a truth which I will discuss in a later chapter when I attempt to demonstrate that God could not have given us the Ten Commandments, the truth namely, that "right" or "morality" cannot exist in a vacuum nor as an absolute concept, but must of necessity be A PART OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES. Nothing is either "ethically" right or wrong, but circumstances make it so.

In any case Jesus constantly employed "parables," dressing the abstracts of neighborliness, love, foresight, etc. in the plain hat and habit of familiar experience.

But in John, mark you, there is not a single parable! Could any reader picture a Jesus who did not use homespun and down-to-earth parables in his teaching? This is a strange portrait of Jesus indeed.

Instead of employing parables to make his meaning crystal clear, the author of John pictures Jesus as teaching or speaking his mind by means of long, elaborate discourses and extended allegories often filled with abstract terms and metaphysical concepts that are difficult to follow and certainly difficult to clearly fathom, and subject to interminable interpretations.

Can any reader truly picture Jesus—as John depicts him—as one who did NOT use parables? The very word "parable" belongs by right and linguistic connotation and familiar association to Jesus, and to Jesus alone. Parables were part and parcel of his intimate and personal style of expression and method of instruction. To represent or portray him as using another method of teaching is to grossly MISrepresent him.

Only a forged of fictitious account would miss this most characteristic feature or facet of his personality. No eye-witness could have ever forgotten his repeated use of parables or could have delineated the man without showing him in this, so to speak, highly characteristic pose.

We could no more picture Napoleon in our mind's eye without his hand thrust into his vest than think of Jesus teaching without his most powerful rhetorical weapon, the parable. And this omission in John is only one of the many altogether irreconcilable differences between John and the three earlier gospels.

For another thing, when we think of Jesus and his teaching, not only its form or method but also its content or subject matter comes naturally to mind. Those who read through Mark, Matthew and Luke, quickly sense that the "burden" or theme of Jesus' teaching is the Kingdom of God. He talks of its imminent approach, how we may inherit it, how we may enter it, what we may liken the Kingdom to, etc. The Kingdom of God is his constant theme, a theme to which he recurs on every possible occasion; it is, so to speak, the recurring motif of his "message," always in evidence like the under-riding theme of a symphonic composition.

But turn to John, and Jesus—according to this forged Gospel—barely mentions the Kingdom of God. Except for one brief reference in John 3: 3-5, there is no allusion at all to the Kingdom. According to the author of John, Jesus' theme is not the Kingdom but HIMSELF. In John, Jesus preaches belief in the NAME of Jesus, belief in Jesus as the Son of God.

> John 3: 15 Whosoever BELIEVETH IN HIM shall not perish but have everlasting life. . . .
>
> John 11: 25 I am the Resurrection and the Life and he that BELIEVETH IN ME . . . shall live. . . .
>
> John 3: 18 He that BELIEVETH ON HIM is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed IN THE NAME of the only begotten son of God. . . .

In the other three gospels, "salvation" or everlasting life was the promised reward of those who practiced kindness, forgiveness, compassion, love, humaneness, religious integrity, and service. These, according to the Jesus of Mark, Matthew and Luke, were the keys to the kingdom, these the passports to "salvation," and NOT the "formal" belief in Jesus' name or the "formal" acknowledgement of Jesus as God's son.

Formalism in religion was the particular evil against which, according to the three earlier gospels, Jesus inveighed: and yet the author of John would wantonly reduce the strong, wholesome, and tolerant religious teaching of Jesus to an almost identical bleak formalism such as Jesus himself deprecated and for opposing which he suffered death.

No longer—in John—is meritorious living, no longer is ethical practice, no longer is the observance of the commandments of love an appropriate "work" acceptable in the sight of God:

> John 6: 28-29 Then said they . . . what shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said. . . . THIS IS THE WORK OF GOD, that ye BELIEVE ON HIM whom he hath sent. . . .

The highest virtue, then, is to BELIEVE ON JESUS. Our supreme duty, according to the words of Jesus, words put into his mouth by the forger of the Gospel of John, is not love or high ethical living or integrity (as Jesus taught in the other gospels), but a "formal" belief in Jesus' name or belief in his relationship to God—THIS, forsooth, is the "work" of God!

If ever there were two different men, they are the Jesus of John and the Jesus of the other three gospels. The two are called by the same name but this is all they have in common. The two are not and cannot be the same man, and the explanation is simple. The anonymous author of John is not speaking of the real or historic Jesus, but is telling us about the made-over, papier mache Jesus of early Christian doctrinology, the forged robot of the unknown author of John, the creation of a nameless forger masquerading under the hood of John the Apostle, but "cucullus non fecit Johannum."

Now, not only is Jesus' method of teaching and the content of his teaching widely different in John, but the very manner of his speech and style of expression differ so strikingly from the manner and style reported in the earlier gospels that even orthodox Christian scholars are frankly bewildered and are themselves forced to question the authenticity of Jesus' utterances in John.

We append a few comments by a few Christian scholars of note:

(1) What should we make of a Gospel which has obviously used earlier Gospels but yet goes its own way, feeling free to REWRITE the tradition? We should be loth (=reluctant) to accept the words of Jesus (that is, the words reported in John) as genuine utterances, for THEY ARE WRITTEN IN THE SAME STYLE AS THE NARRATIVE (my caps). . . .

—*W. K. Lowther Clarke, "Concise Bible Commentary."*

(2) In the discourses particularly, Jesus speaks IN THE SAME WORDS (my caps) that the author of John customarily uses; the vocabulary and style (of both Jesus and the author of John) are all but indistinguishable (that is, are identical for all practical purposes). . . .

—*Charles Laymon, "Christianity and the New Testament."*

(3) The style is the same throughout so that it is often difficult to tell where the narrative ends and the teaching begins; the words of Jesus seem to merge into the comments or meditations of the writer (e. g., John 3: 10 ff). . . .

—*H. A. Guy, "A Critical Introduction to the Gospels."*

(4) When this Gospel (John) was regarded as a record of Jesus' life and work written by the disciple John . . . its value both as a historical document and as an inspired revelation was beyond challenge. When (later) the problem of

> its authorship was seen to have no certain solution, there was a marked tendency to deny it any place in the historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus. Its narratives were often regarded as FICTITIOUS settings for IMAGINARY discourses in which the writer expounded HIS OWN VIEWS (my caps) about Jesus. . .
>
> —*The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII, p.* 448.

The above quotations—if they do nothing else—amply testify to the irreconcilable differences which all Christian scholars recognize between Jesus' style of expression as reported in John and the characteristic vocabulary and style of speech reported in the other three gospels. Jabez T. Sunderland indicates how striking the contrast is:

> In place of the crystal clear short sentences (which we find in Mark, Matthew and Luke), each sentence so brief and sharp and fresh and full of meaning that no one can ever forget them, Jesus everywhere (in John) speaks in long sentences in a vocabulary of intellectual and philosophical terms, in elaborate, mystical′ metaphysical discourses. . . .
>
> —*Origin and Character of the Bible.*

Another scholar of note in his section on the Gospel of John, tries to fathom this striking difference of style:

> The discourses of Jesus differ remarkably from those in the other three Gospels, where they consist for the most part of parables or short memorable (that is, easily remembered) rules of the way in which life is meant to be lived. . . . In view of the sharp differences in style between John and the other Gospels, are we to suppose that Jesus spoke in different styles on different occasions or are we to suppose that "John" is re-writing in HIS OWN STYLE of expression what Jesus spoke in Aramaic , . . ?
>
> —*J. B. Phillips, "The Gospels."*

In connection with these diverse comments on the sharp differences in the style of Jesus' expression in John as compared to his style of speech in Mark, Matthew and Luke, we recall the old axiom that "the style is the man." The style or way in which we write or express ourselves reveals our personality almost as surely as the typewritten sheet reveals the machine on which it was typed, or the markings on a bullet identify the gun from which it was fired.

To instance the matter of style still further, there are a number of plays in which Shakespeare collaborated with other playwrights, but after we have read Shakespeare's works with some degree of appreciation and have become "saturated" with his style and diction—and if we do not absolutely have "the ear of an ass," as Coleridge expressed it—we can detect with a high degree of accuracy which lines are his and which are not in such collaborated plays. "Taming of the Shrew" is an excellent example, if the reader wishes to pursue the matter.

Another case in point is Mark Twain's attempted demonstration in his book "Christian Science" that Mary Baker Eddy, the "purported" (with a nod toward Phineas Quimby) founder of Christian Science, could not have written "Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures" as is claimed because, as Mr. Twain tries to show, it is NOT written in her highly distinctive and characteristic style of composition. He supports his thesis by comparative studies of matter known and acknowledged to have been written by Miss Eddy with matter taken from "Science and Health."

Regardless of whether Mark Twain proves his thesis or not—it is not our province to sway the reader one way or the other, although we suggest that he read this very interesting and little known work of Clemens—the point is that style of speech and writing is a highly individualized thing and that it is today universally recognized that "style" can be used to ascertain authorship or origin, no less in literature as in great artistic works like the paintings of the masters, and sculpture.

Accordingly, when Christian scholars unanimously acknowledge the vast difference in the style of expression of Jesus' discourses in John, these discourses should be immediately suspect, and regarded as in all probability WHOLLY FICTITIOUS or forged, and certainly not in any way comparable in relative authenticity with the reported words of Jesus in Mark, Matthew and Luke.

The further fact—now well verified—that this fourth Gospel of "John" was written in the Second Century A.D. and therefore many generations after Jesus' death, should confirm our suspicions of its evident lack of authenticity. As a matter of fact, orthodox Christian scholars in general consider "John" completely unreliable insofar as it recounts events in the life of Jesus and equally untrustworthy as it relates his specific teachings and reveals his personality.

Certainly one clear indication of the forged character of the Gospel of John is the fact that it is attributed to John the Apostle, one of Jesus' own twelve disciples. This attribution to John was perfectly plausible and credible as long as those to whom it was addressed were deluded into believing it had been written in the First Century by a contemporary and a companion of Jesus.

The author of John hides his true identity or prefers it not to be known that "he" is the author, so that his account will be received as a genuine eye-witness report. But here the forger over-reached himself in several important respects, and forgery will "out" no less than murder.

First, he did not realize that eventually the date of his writing could be fairly well established, making authorship by the original Apostle John highly improbable, if not indeed impossible. In the second place, no tradition or historic record, ecclesiastical report, letter or other memorandum indicates or hints the survival of any of the original disciples into the Second Century, and it is difficult to suppose that one of Jesus' disciples was still alive at this late date WITHOUT SOME ALLUSION TO HIS SURVIVAL having been made.

To offset even the dim or unlikely possibility of John the Apostle's survival into the Second Century there is also a tradition (reputedly preserved or hinted at in Mark 10: 39) that the Apostle John had suffered martyrdom. Inasmuch as the gospel of Mark was written around 70 A.D., and John had already presumably died a martyr's death prior to that time, he could not of course have been around to write the Gospel in the Second Century, any more than Moses could have written the books erroneously attributed to him (as we have elsewhere noted).

And the forger of John may have over-reached himself in a third respect when he sought to pretend that the disciple John was the author, or at least when he hoped that the Gospel would be ascribed to this disciple. For John, the son of Zebedee, was originally a fisherman, and we may assume incapable, by every measure of probability, to have been the author of this highly metaphysical and erudite Gospel.

There is a possibility that John (the disciple) could not even write his own name, because few could write in those far-off days and then only those who had been specifically trained to do so. Certainly apprenticeship to the rude trade of fishing would leave little time for the wide scholarship needed to compose the book of John or for the philosophical and stylistic subtleties which we find in John.

Apropos of the suggestion made above, the Schaff-Herzog "Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge," a highly meritorious and informative work by orthodox scholars, makes the following comment:

> There is next to nothing in the character of John, the son of Zebedee, as we see it in the Gospels and the early chapters of Acts which marks him out as fitted to be the author of John. . . .

More than one dedicated Bible scholar has come up against this obstacle or stumbling block to the acceptance of the Fourth Gospel as the work of the disciple John, and we would like to again quote for the reader from one of the finest of the more recent works on the Gospels:

> The place of writing (of the "Gospel of John") is generally assumed to be Ephesus. . . . This place was a center of Jewish philosophical thought such as is reflected in this Gospel. . . . An alternative is Alexandria, where Philo had lived and where there was a strong colony of educated Jews, as well as a Christian church which was outstanding in learning and study and might well contain a man CAPABLE OF WRITING SUCH A BOOK (my caps). . . .
>
> —*H. A. Guy, "A Critical Introduction to the Gospels."*

The author of John never comes out from the anonymous shell under which he hides, to say exactly who he is. However, with consummate cunning he drops a hint here, and another there, to indicate who the reader might be justified in believing the author was. This procedure can hardly be accidental or the result of chance: it is deliberate.

The method of concealment and vague intimation is too constantly employed to be fortuitous. But why all the mystery? If John the Apostle (one of the twelve original disciples of Jesus) was indeed the author, it could have been plainly so stated, instead of such ambiguous givings-out as we find in John 21: 20-24, where we read:

> Then Peter, turning, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper and said, Lord which is he that betrayeth thee? . . . This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things and wrote these things and "WE" know that his testimony is true. . . .

An appropriate question at this point is, who is the "WE" of the above passage? It cannot be the Apostle who wrote thus about himself and declared: "We" know "his" (=my) testimony is true. . . .

From the verse John 21: 24, it becomes evident that others or at least another (perhaps speaking for a group) is writing rather than John the Apostle, who has often been claimed as the author of this purported gospel which we now know was written or "fabricated" in the Second Century.

Several more ambiguous references are made in John to the disciple "whom Jesus loved" who is mentioned in the passage already quoted; for example:

> John 20: 2-4: Then she (Mary Magdalene) runneth and cometh to Simon Peter, and to THE OTHER DISCIPLE WHOM

> JESUS LOVED, and saith unto them, they have taken Jesus out of the sepulchre. . . . Peter therefore went forth and THE OTHER DISCIPLE and came to the sepulchre . . . they ran both together, and THE OTHER DISCIPLE did outrun Peter. . . .

Why is "the other disciple" not named? Again I ask, why all the hugger-mugger and cloak-and-dagger mystery? Was the author ashamed to acknowledge his identity, giving only oblique clues as to who he might be? Peter and Mary Magdalene are named in the passage but why not the other disciple? Three times in this passage (above quoted) he is mentioned but each time he is described only vaguely as "the other disciple." It is important to us because later we are told that "he" (that is, "the other disciple") wrote the Gospel.

Anonymity certainly adds nothing to make the person who reads such testimony to credit it the more—rather it sets us to seriously doubt the genuineness of the testimony.

There can be only one rational or satisfactory explanation of such wary concealment and that is that the author did not wish himself to be known as the writer and yet feared to be pinned down if he "named names." He therefore left the author to whom he expected to attribute his forgery nameless, to provide, by vague ambiguity, an escape hatch for himself should the forgery be detected or its authorship called into question.

Leaving himself an "out" even in John 21: 2 where "the sons of Zebedee" (John and James) are specifically mentioned, the author, after giving names to five of the seven disciples, leaves the other two nameless.

Further on in verse 7 (John 21: 7) we learn that one of the seven had to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved":

> Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith to Peter. . . .

Again, why was not the disciple directly named? According to John 21: 7 "the disciple whom Jesus loved" could be either one of the two unnamed disciples spoken of in John 21: 2, or he could be John or James or Thomas or Nathanael, all of whom it is said were in the ship when the miraculous draught of fishes purportedly occurred.

At this juncture we would like to refer the reader to the recital of the same event (the miraculous draught of fishes) in Luke (Luke 5: 3-10) and we will at once observe that, as reported by Luke, the event occurred at an entirely different time and on an entirely different occasion as those suggested by the author of John. According to Luke's account, it occurred a long while before Jesus' death; in fact, it must have occurred early in his ministry, because (as Luke tells it) it resulted in the "vocation" or call to discipleship of Peter, James and John.

When the unknown author of John, writing in the Second Century, retold the same miraculous event, he altered the account and represented the event as occurring, not as in Luke, early in Jesus' ministry, but he assures us it occurred AFTER Jesus had "risen" from the grave. And in John the miracle is not performed by Jesus (as Luke intimates) merely to impress Peter and the sons of Zebedee, but is performed so that the disciples can recognize him as their "risen" Master:

> John 21: 1 Jesus shewed himself AGAIN to the disciples (the account of his earlier purported "appearance" after crucifixion is in John 20: 19) on this wise. . . . The disciples . . . went forth into a ship and that night caught nothing. . . . But the morning was come and Jesus stood on shore, but the disciples knew not it was Jesus. . . . Jesus said, cast the net on the right side (even then, according to the author of John, they did not recognize Jesus) . . . they cast and now were unable to draw the net because of the multitude of fishes. . . . THE DISCIPLE WHO LOVED JESUS (my caps) said to Peter, it is the Lord. . . .

Luke's account follows:

> Luke 5: 3-11 and Jesus entered into one of the ships . . . and asked Peter to thrust out a little from the land . . . and Jesus taught the people out of the ship. . . . When he stopped speaking, he said, launch out and let down your nets for a draught. Peter said, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing . . . nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. . . . And when they had done this, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes. . . . Peter was astonished, and so also was James and John who were partners with Peter. And Jesus said . . . from henceforth thou shalt catch men. . . . And they forsook all and followed him. . . .

Either (1) Luke's account of the time, the occasion and the manner in which the miracle happened is mistaken or (2) the author of John deliberately twisted the chronology or timing and altered the occasion and manner of the miracle's occurrence to suit his own devious purposes. The two divergent accounts CANNOT BOTH BE TRUE.

Now, inasmuch as Luke is corroborated by Mark (the earliest Gospel) as to the time and occasion on which the event occurred, we must conclude that as between John's account and Luke's account, Luke's must be considered far more worthy of our belief. This makes the author of John out a clever liar and propagandist, using the event as he does as a subtle corroboration of Jesus' resurrection.

Of course, even Luke is not entirely without guilt because he himself enlarged fantastically on Mark's simple account of the event which led Peter to abandon his nets and follow Jesus. For the reader's quick reference, we quote Mark's account also:

> Mark 1: 16-21 Now as Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee he saw Simon Peter and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea . . . and Jesus said, come after me and I will make you fishers of men. And straightway they left their nets and followed him. . . . A little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother . . . mending nets and he called them and they left their father and followed him. . . .

Mark's account of the events leading to the discipleship of Peter (and James and John) is simplicity itself. There is no miracle, no miraculous draught of fishes, no "superhuman" element in Mark's version. And again we must remind ourselves that the gospel of Mark was far and away the earliest account of Jesus' life and that it appears certain that Luke (as well as each of the other gospellists) had to depend on Mark for his information regarding the events in Jesus' life. Where then did Luke learn of the miracle that he testifies attended Peter's "calling?"

Is this added miracle not just another excellent example of the progressive dehumanization of Jesus and his gradual exaltation into a superhuman quasi-divine being? The element of miracle is absent in Mark's simple, humanly credible account of the event. Luke invents and adds the miraculous ingredient to spice or spruce up the story, and then comes the author of John and uses this fictitious ingredient to "substantiate" Jesus' resurrection.

The truth about Jesus is so deeply buried under layer after layer of fiction and forgery, fancy and fantasy, legend and legerdemain, myth and magic, that it almost defies detection and we can understand why even dedicated seekers after the truth, particularly those who are deterred by a mistaken reverence for "sacred" things, never glimpse it, save on occasion as a will-o-the-wisp that darts and glimmers behind a murky veil. Let us be assured that there is nothing more truly sacred than the truth and at the same time be equally assured that the truth can never harm God or be detrimental to valid religious values. Only someone who has something to hide is afraid of the blazing light of truth.

The simple process of Peter's calling related by Mark AND repeated by Matthew verbatim, is "enlarged" in Luke to include a relatively simple or "natural" miracle, but in John it is further enlarged, and the one only miracle of Luke is overlaid by another purported miracle and this a miracle of a tremendous and supernatural kind, viz., the "resurrection" of Jesus. A large haul of fish might sometimes befall even under the natural law of chance but never the "resurrection" of a man from his tomb except it were by supernatural power.

Did the presumptuous author of John expect to impose his forged account of this event on men to the end of time in spite of his egregious distortion of the episode when other and earlier accounts of the same incident still existed?

John's account testifies it was a "risen" Jesus who was responsible for the so-called "miraculous" draught of fishes, but his account is contradicted by Luke, who declares that "the master" was still alive when he performed this miracle, and both John's account and Luke's account are in turn contradicted by Mark AND Matthew, both of whom report that no such miracle occurred in connection with Peter's "calling."

A comparison of the same event as recorded in the four gospels thus enables us to arrive at the probable truth and detect John's forgery, and Luke's addition; but suppose that by some chance of fate, all copies of the three earlier gospels had disappeared during the period of Christian persecution. We would then be forced to suppose—other things being equal—that John's narration "might" be an authentic one and that it was a risen Jesus who had performed the miracle.

Or suppose that one copy of Luke still remained, but no copies of Mark or Matthew. We would then have two apparent "witnesses" telling of the miraculous draught, although their stories differed somewhat. At least we might then believe that the miraculous draught occurred but would be put in doubt as to the fact of "resurrection" as far as this passage is concerned. But we would not be aware of the fact that neither account was authentic but that they were dressed-up versions based on the "lost" accounts of Mark and Matthew.

Just because we have the book of Mark, we can check on the accuracy of the reports in the other three gospels, but unfortunately no earlier written account than Mark is extant, so we can have no possible way of assessing the accuracy or authenticity of this first gospel.

There are still other significant circumstances that give the lie to John's version of the incident of the miraculous draught of fishes related in Chapter 21, which we will attempt to outline. For example, in Chapter 20 we are informed that Jesus had "risen," that he had returned to his disciples in Jerusalem and that he had given them what appears to be his final instructions or the "commission" he wished them to carry out. In addition, also in Chapter 20, Jesus invokes his plenary blessing upon all future disciples, who shall "believe" without the proofs he has so plentifully vouchsafed to his original disciples, and particularly without the visible and tactual proofs he has just offered his disciple Thomas who had STILL doubted his resurrection despite the plentiful proofs of his power mentioned above, and who (we are told) continued to remain in doubt until these further tangible and visual proofs were supplied.

The author concludes Chapter 20 with the statement that he has written his treatise so that his readers might CONFIDENTLY believe that Jesus was the Christ (=the Messiah), a title which he equates with "the Son of God":

> John 20: 31 But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life THROUGH HIS NAME (my caps). . . .

This sounds like a closing attestation and indeed makes a fitting conclusion. But then, as H. A. Guy points out in his brilliant book, "A Critical Introduction to the Gospels":

> . . . the story seems to start all over again (in Chapter 21)—with the disciples not in Jerusalem (where they had been in Chapter 20), but in Galilee, where, apparently NOT BELIEVING THE STORY OF THE RESURRECTION (my caps), they go fishing and are SURPRISED to find Jesus meeting them. . . .

It seems most unlikely that the disciples would have returned to Galilee from Jerusalem to resume their old trade of fishing if Jesus had indeed appeared to them in Jerusalem and had there commissioned them as related in Chapter 20, where it is further reported he "breathed on them" so that they might receive the "Holy Ghost" and instructed them to "go forth."

With these inspiring words ringing in their ears, reinforced by Jesus' miraculous appearance to them after he had died before their very eyes, it would seem probable that they would have gone enthusiastically forth into the world as he had commissioned them to do, rather than forget the whole thing and tamely go back to their former trade of fishing in apparent disillusionment or disbelief.

It seems possible that (1) either the author of John has overreached himself again and become tangled in his own skein of fictions or (2) that Chapter 21 is a chapter appended to the forged gospel of John by still another hand. But the point is that whether it was written by the author of the first twenty chapters or by another, in either case the version given in Chapter 21 is clearly not an authentic or biographical version, and must be regarded as forgery, pure and simple, whether by the author of John or another "person unknown."

Even considering the Gospel of John in its literary as well as its psychological aspects, it is inconceivable that the disciple John—if he were indeed the author and the "disciple whom Jesus loved"—would have set about to describe himself in this fashion. It is far more likely and far more reasonable to assume that another person would use such phraseology in describing the disciple John.

Consider the overweening conceit on the disciple John's part, and the unwarranted assumption (an arrogant presumption in effect) that he knew what was in Jesus' mind and heart—a privilege which is generally reserved only for novelists or other fiction writers who have an inside window to the thoughts and emotions of their fictitious characters.

For my part I can scarce conceive that Jesus loved one disciple more than another, which is what the phraseology implies; and there is nothing that I can discover in the three earlier gospels which would indicate a unique partiality on Jesus' part toward the disciple John.

The purported self-designation of John as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" has an analogue in "Numbers," one of the Old Testament books, whose authorship is attributed to Moses, where we read:

> Numbers 12: 3 Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth. . . .

It seems evident that if Moses had been the author and had written about himself after this fashion, he would have betrayed by the mere fact of his making such a statement (as Thomas Paine has pointed out) that he was NOT the "meek" man he declared he was.

People simply do not write about themselves thus, and the only reasonable conclusion to be reached in connection with the gospel of John is that it could not have been written by the disciple John, on psychological grounds as well as on the grounds already mentioned. The further fact that a man ordinarily speaks of himself in the first person, rather than the third, again but confirms this conclusion.

However, whoever it was that wrote John, it is quite clear that he claims or pretends that he, the author, was an actual eye-witness to the events he describes. It is important that the reader be convinced of this pretension, as it bears importantly on the question whether the forgery of the Gospel was or was not "deliberate" or perpetrated, as you might say, "with malice aforethought."

In John 1: 14, the writer of the gospel clearly declares that he and others "beheld Jesus' glory":

> And the Word (=Jesus) was made flesh, and dwelt among us and "WE" beheld his glory. . . .

Whoever wrote the book of John claims that "we" (that is, he and others) saw Jesus' "glory" with their own eyes.

Again, in John 19: 35, the anonymous author gives us further assurance that his is an eye-witness report:

> And he that SAW it bare record and his record is true: and he KNOWETH that he saith true, that ye might believe. . . .

In this passage the words "he saw it" informs us that what is recorded in the gospel is an eye-witness account. We are asked to "believe" on the basis of this man's evidence. Yet if we do not know the identity of this man, how can we conscientiously give his testimony any credence or credit? When we realize further that he pretends to be another person than he actually is, does not this deception regarding his own identity make it highly probable (or virtually certain) that he is lying in his teeth as well about what he is trying to pass off as an eye-witness account?

Besides, when we know too that his account does not agree with the testimony of other more credible witnesses, namely Mark, Luke and the author of Matthew, all of whom wrote in the First Century, then we can be morally certain that the entire gospel of John is forged, a forgery deliberately perpetrated, and EXPRESSLY for doctrinal purposes, as indicated in the passage just quoted:

> John 19: 35 And he that saw it and bare record and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE. . . .

In the closing attestation, the author again "expressly" states his doctrinal purpose:

> John 20: 31 These are written THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life IN HIS NAME. . . .

Bible scholars on every hand—including devoted orthodox Christian scholars—acknowledge without hesitation that the gospel of John was written with a theological slant, and so preponderantly so, that they quite realize that it cannot be regarded as authentic biography. That truly monumental organ of modern orthodox Christian thought, the "Interpreters Bible," comments:

> The aim of the author of John is theological rather than biographical . . . from the prologue to the closing attestation, the story IS SUBORDINATED TO DOCTRINE (my caps). . . .
>
> —*Interpreters Bible, Vol. VIII, p.* 437

The Rev. W. K. Lowther Clarke in his illuminating one-volume "Concise Bible Commentary" (p. 769) readily concedes that while we should be reluctant "to accept the words of Jesus (in the gospel of John) as genuine utterances," we should perhaps esteem the book of John on other grounds:

> . . . we should welcome a document which threw light on the dogmatic faith of the early Church. . . .

Exactly! Scholars may quite properly reject the gospel of John as far as the authenticity of Jesus' utterances contained therein is concerned and reject it as authentic biography but we should still realize that the Fourth Gospel is valuable to the world because it sheds light on the DOGMATIC faith of the EARLY Church.

Of course such a book is of no help to seekers after the facts who are primarily concerned about finding out the truth about Jesus and HIS teachings, but is of value only to those who seek to learn how the "dogmas" of the Christian Church "evolved" through the First Century and into the Second. In short, the Gospel of John is NOT biography, but theology.

But then why, you might ask, is it set side by side with the other three gospels with no word to warn readers that it is not, like them, to be accepted as a presumably authentic biography of Jesus and a presumably authentic record of his teachings? Why is it not clearly stated that Bible scholarship has repudiated this gospel as a "gospel" and that it has value only to church historians?

Even in our philosophy of law, fraud need not be expressed in words but can be found to be present in a situation where MATERIAL FACTS ARE CONCEALED in silence. Certainly, if we cannot practice complete honesty where the Bible is concerned, why should we murmur at "rigged" television shows or dishonesty and corruption in politics?

Thus far we have mentioned a few of the striking discrepancies and contrasts between John and the other gospels, but we shall presently see that these discrepancies infiltrate and invade ALL aspects of the "gospel" of John.

This gospel's discrepancies not only misrepresent Jesus' style of expression and his vigorous and earthy vocabulary, and his characteristic method of instruction (viz., the parable), and the basic themes of his teaching (repentance, the Kingdom of God, obedience to certain ethical commandments, etc.), but also distort many ordinary biographical events in his life so that their significance is given a new bias, and alter the essential nature of the miracles he is reported to have performed, and seriously color his basic personality.

No eye-witness, we feel certain—and will attempt to continue to demonstrate—could have deviated so completely from the relatively more authentic picture of Jesus (his message, his life and his personality), which the earlier gospel tradition in Mark, Matthew and Luke gives us.

Let it be at once understood that the account that "John" gives us is not only different, but incompatible—irreconcilably incompatible—with the "composite" account of Mark, Matthew and Luke.

Their "composite" account and John's single account are as incompatible as the contradictory accounts of two witnesses in a murder trial, one of whom swears that he saw the defendant at the scene of the slaying in New York when the crime was being committed and the other of whom testifies he spent the entire day on which the crime occurred with the accused in Chicago. One witness MUST either be lying deliberately or be seriously mistaken. It is impossible in the nature of things for two such contrary accounts to be true.

We will also attempt to uncover, if we can, the reason for these differences in John, because where so many divergencies exist in two accounts of the same person and events, there must be some rational explanation, could we but search it out. We shall further endeavor to ascertain whether this divergent portrayal of Jesus' life and acts is deliberate on the part of the author of John and if so, his probable motive in presenting a delineation of Jesus differing so much from the earlier tradition.

We have already seen how some events in the life of Jesus were distorted in John's version. Let us now examine and compare a few other events. To begin with, the three earlier gospels tell us that the incident in which Jesus chased the money-changers from the temple (Mark 11: 15) occurred near the end of Jesus' ministry, and as a matter of fact was apparently the proximate or immediate cause of his arrest and death:

> Mark 11: 18 When the chief priests heard of it (the "cleansing" of the temple) they sought how to destroy Jesus. . . .

The author of John, on the other hand, informs us that the "cleansing" occurred at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry on the first of three (or more) visits to Jerusalem. Here, as elsewhere, we are faced with a choice: either all three of the earlier gospels were wrong or John (written in the Second Century) is wrong. The weight of evidence, likelihood and scholarship all favor the greater authenticity of the three EARLIER gospels, which means that the account of the incident in John must be considered spurious and forged.

The treatment of this episode is typical of the manner in which the anonymous author of John twists events. He is not concerned with relating the truth; rather he narrates or jigsaws events in Jesus' life to fit his "argument" or propaganda (that is to say, he gerrymanders them to corroborate his own doctrines, theses and theories about Jesus). Let us see how this is done.

In the first three gospels, the cleansing of the temple is apparently accomplished by Jesus on sudden impulse but in John it is represented as an action taken with slow deliberation, and "John's" motive in this seems to be to show that Jesus was fully conscious of his supreme authority and entertained no fear of the consequences of his act.

To show that Jesus acted with calm and "divine" deliberation rather than on the sudden "human" impulse of overpowering indignation at the money-changers when he came upon them plying their trade in the temple (as the other gospels report), John tells us that Jesus deliberately took time out first to fabricate a scourge of small cords and then, and only then, approached the money-changers to drive them forth. If Jesus could be borne along on the upsurge of a sudden human impulse, (the author of John apparently reasoned) the implication would be that he was as subject to human emotion as any man, whereas a divine being would be above such "impulsive" actions, and would approach the situation calmly and objectively:

> John 2: 13-15 Jesus went up to Jerusalem and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves and the changers of money sitting; and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple . . . and overthrew the tables. . . .

Contrast Mark's recital of the incident:

> Mark 11: 15 And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple and began to cast out them that sold and bought in

> the temple and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. . . .

In Mark's account where Jesus' anger is aroused, there is no "cooling-off" period recorded as in John, no word of any time taken out to allow for the calm fabrication of a scourge before taking action against the money-changers.

Only in John is there a scourge mentioned, fabricated, or used; in the other three gospels Jesus acts swiftly on the impulse of the moment, while his anger is at white heat.

John further represents Jesus as OPENLY continuing his ministry for several years after this incident, whereas in the other three gospels, Jesus apparently went into hiding after its occurrence. There would otherwise have been no need on the part of the offended priests to pay someone thirty pieces of silver (as we are told) to reveal where Jesus was to be found.

In Mark, immediately after the "cleansing" of the temple, we are told:

> Mark 11: 9 Jesus went out of the city. . . .

The author of John wishes in his version, we may conclude, to entirely overcome the implication of fear that would be conveyed to the reader by the suggested hugger-mugger and flight on Jesus' part. He therefore pretends that the event occurred early in Jesus' ministry, and that Jesus continued to preach openly and fearlessly after the event for several years.

Perhaps being from the outlying regions, Jesus was not entirely familiar with the urban temple practice of "changing money," a practice which was established by the priests to permit strangers with "strange" coin to change such coin into coin acceptable to the officials of the temple, so that these strangers might be enabled to purchase doves, oxen, or sheep for sacrifice in the temple. This money-changing was established, as I understand it, to aid strangers (and probably natives too) who wished to buy and offer a "sacrifice" to Yahweh in the temple.

No doubt Jesus saw that severe and unfair advantage was being taken of persons during the "changing" of the money, a circumstance that would have instantly aroused his fierce anger. Perhaps too, even the practice of "sacrifice" in itself was revolting to Jesus as improper to religious worship and yet if so, it was ironical that he was himself later to be regarded as just such another sacrifice under the guise of "the lamb."

Again, contrary to the earlier gospel tradition (found in Mark, Matthew and Luke), which tells us that Jesus' ministry was mainly carried on in the "country" outside Jerusalem, except for the one fatal visit to the "Holy City," the book of John relates that Jesus' ministry was concentrated mainly in and around Jerusalem, with only "side trips" (of very secondary importance) into Galilee. The weight of evidence of course favors the earlier tradition regarding the geographical "locale" of the ministry.

Also, while we cannot be absolutely certain of the duration of Jesus' ministry, according to the three earlier gospels it was a year or less (as Albert Schweitzer also calculated), whereas the author of John represents it as covering a period of possibly two or three years. There is only one Passover chronicled in the three earlier gospels, but John's chronology includes two or three such annual feasts.

In this connection we might call the reader's attention to the circumstance that Mark, Matthew and Luke tell us Jesus died after the Passover meal (familiar to us as the "Last" Supper), while John asserts the Last Supper occurred the evening before the Passover, and he has his reasons—albeit spurious—for making this assertion.

Freedom in handling historical and biographical material is sometimes permitted to dramatists and novelists, operating under a limited poetic license, and this freedom is notoriously taken by propagandists without such license, but no such freedom should be permitted or taken by one who pretends to be relating facts of sacred revelation or facts of serious biography.

In the last few paragraphs we have mentioned but a few discrepancies between John's narration of events in the life of Jesus and the narration of these same events by the other three gospels, in addition to those noted earlier in the chapter.

We have seen for example, not only that the principal "place" of Jesus' ministry is different in John (Jerusalem instead of Galilee), but also that its "duration" is different (some three years long in John against a possible duration of one year in the other gospels); we have also seen that the incident known as the "cleansing" of the temple occurs in John at the beginning of Jesus' ministry whereas the same incident occurs (according to the other gospels) near the very end of his ministry.

Let us now rapidly list a few other SIGNIFICANT variations:

(1) In John, Jesus is recognized by his disciples as the Messiah from the beginning: in the other gospels, this recognition by the

disciples comes much later (although the "demons" Jesus "exorcises" recognize him sooner).

(2) In John, Jesus bears his own cross to the place of execution (John 19: 17), whereas the other three gospels all agree in reporting that Simon of Cyrene bore Jesus' cross. (See Mark 15: 21, also Matthew 27: 32, and Luke 23: 26) This episode may have been altered by the author of John to put to rest or silence a disturbing rumor or tradition that Simon had also actually died in place of Jesus.

(3) In John, Jesus' dying words of despair and disappointment reported by Mark and Matthew, viz., "My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" are omitted. We can readily understand why.

(4) In John, Jesus is NOT baptized by John the Baptist, although he is baptized by him in the other three gospels. This silence or omission in John is very significant and is often interpreted as an effort on the anonymous author's part to refute the claims of another sect which regarded John the Baptist as the true Messiah. This would also explain the fact that the author of John (and he alone of the gospellists) has the Baptist declare or "testify" about Jesus that "this is he of whom I spoke that is PREFERRED before me, because he was (=existed) before me. . . ." and he has the Baptist specifically deny that he (the Baptist) is the Messiah: (John 3: 28 "I am not the Messiah, but I am sent before him . . .").

(5) The earlier gospels tell us that Jesus died AFTER the Passover meal (which Jesus shared with his disciples). In John, we are told that Jesus was executed BEFORE the Passover. This apparently minor "alteration" is in fact deeply significant as we shall see later on.

According to Mark, the Last Supper WAS the Passover meal. John on the other hand, declares that the Last Supper took place (John 13: 1) "before the feast of the Passover." John's account therefore flatly contradicts Mark's version of the event. (Mark 14: 12 ff "And the first day of unleavened bread when they killed the passover, his disciples said to Jesus, where wilt thou we go to eat the passover . . . ?")

(6) In John, there is no actual "agony" on Jesus' part at Gethsemane, only calmness; nor is there any "transfiguration" episode in John; and no "temptation" of Jesus either (all duly recorded in the other three gospels).

(7) The gospel of John reports the presence of Jesus' mother and the mysterious "beloved" disciple ("the disciple whom Jesus loved") at the cross. Their presence at the cross is not reported by the other gospellists. Is the beloved disciple then just a figment added to the picture by the unknown author of John?

(8) Details of Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, burial and resurrection differ significantly in John. For example, in John alone there is no kiss of betrayal. According to John's account, Jesus was NOT "betrayed." Jesus had to surrender himself up voluntarily, for this fitted better into John's doctrinized theory of Jesus. In addition, in John only is Jesus' side pierced with a spear while he is hanging on the cross: how very significant this is we will try to demonstrate further on. Again, in John alone the legs of the thieves who are crucified with Jesus are broken; in John only is Jesus reported to have worn a "seamless" garment (John 19: 23 "the coat was without seam . . ."); and in John only, do we learn that Jesus' sepulcher was in a garden. Many of these details are really quite significant because they bear on John's motivation and his deliberate forgery of events to fit his doctrinal propaganda, as we shall see.

(9) The "action" of Jesus' ministry in John takes place chiefly in Jerusalem: in the others, the action is centered largely in Galilee and the surrounding country, and reaches Jerusalem only near the end of his ministry (the final weeks).

(10) Mark tells us Jesus began his ministry after John the Baptist was imprisoned: (Mark 1: 14 "Now after John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. . . .") But John has a contradictory story to tell us: (John 4: 1 "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John. . . .") This passage indicates that Jesus started his preaching ministry before John was imprisoned, for the implication is clear that both were "active" at the same time. And other passages corroborate this.

(11) In John, the Baptist is the "forerunner" of Jesus, while in the other gospels John the Baptist is, so to speak, a prophet in his own right, preaching repentance and proclaiming "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1: 4).

John 1: 15 "John the Baptist bare witness of the Word (=Jesus), crying: This was he of whom I spake; he that cometh after me is preferred before me. . . ."

(12) Not one of Jesus' works of healing of persons presumably "possessed" by demons is reported in John, and this circumstance is highly significant too (perhaps this item might more properly be included in our later discussion of "miraculous" events as contrasted to natural "biographical" events such as we are now listing).

(13) In the three earlier gospels, Jesus uses the title "Son of Man" in the third person and almost invariably in a FUTURISTIC sense. Contrariwise, the author of John speaks of Jesus

> as the Messiah or "Son of Man" in the very PRESENT, and as if he HAD COME UPON EARTH AS THE MESSIAH.

As I see it, the earlier gospels reflect Jesus' thinking: he expected to assume the role of the Messiah or "Son of Man" sometime in the future, viz., at the time when the Kingdom of God was established on earth.

But the book of John reflects the thinking of the author of John, namely that Jesus filled the role of Messiah even during his lifetime. In John it is no longer, "are you he that SHALL COME?" (looking to the future) but he that is already here. The implications of this divergent attitude toward the Messiahship are far-reaching.

> (14) In the three earlier gospels, Jesus does not ever VOLUNTARILY or of his own initiative reveal his secret or inner conviction that he was the Messiah that the prophets had foretold was to come. It is Peter who reveals it at Cesarea Philippi. After Jesus had asked his disciples "Whom do YOU say that I am?" Peter replies: (Mark 8: 29) "And Peter answereth and saith unto Jesus, Thou art the Messiah (translated into "Christos" in Greek) . . . ."

Jesus does not deny Peter's conjecture or declaration, but rather apparently affirms it by his silence and the implications of his admonition to the disciples following Peter's so-called "confession": (Mark 8:30 "And Jesus charged them that they should tell no man . . .").

Later, when Jesus finally admits his "secret" at his trial before the high priest, the revelation may be said to have been wrung from him by the pressure of circumstances, rather than to have been voluntarily given, just as the thought-bogged Hamlet might similarly be said to have been pricked, goaded, and swept by the tide of circumstances into "action" against the King in the final scene in "Hamlet":

Mark 14: 60 And the high priest stood up and asked Jesus answerest thou nothing? . . . And Jesus held his peace and answered nothing. Again and again the high priest urged him. . . . Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said: I am; and ye shall see me coming in the clouds of heaven. . . .

Compare this painfully wrung admission and Jesus' countless admonitions to secrecy in the early gospel accounts with the very different account in John. In John, Jesus does not try to keep his Messiahship a secret at all, but on the contrary, he "proclaims" it: he declares it openly, admits it freely, and publicly—sometimes almost boastfully—asserts his Messianic claim and title. Needless to say, if the accounts of Mark, Matthew and Luke are authentic in this respect, the account in John is NOT authentic, but as we have indicated, is forged (and for a purpose). It is manifestly impossible for both accounts to be authentic.

As indicated in the above catalogue of biographical divergencies, the details of John's resurrection story differ from the details given in the other gospels. For example, "John" tells us that when Mary Magdalene turned from the empty tomb (after talking to two angels "in white" inside the tomb), she "saw Jesus standing and knew not that it was Jesus. . . ." (John 20: 14.) This lack of recognition at close quarters seems somewhat incredible on the part of one who had known Jesus so well, yet John assures us she mistook Jesus for "a gardener."

John's, too, as we have hinted, is the only resurrection story that locates Jesus' sepulcher in a garden (See John 19: 41). Perhaps the author of John decided to locate the tomb in a garden, so that he could corroborate this "invented" detail of the garden by citing another detail namely, that Mary had the delusion that Jesus was a gardener.

This is ever the method or modus operandi of the clever novelist or story-teller, viz., to provide details that seem to hang together and corroborate each other and thus increase the credibility of the fictions he is weaving and to give them the sense and sound of reality. When such methods are used for serious deception instead of amusement, we have deliberate forgery, and when such forgery is used TO WIN BELIEF, it becomes out-and-out propaganda.

John uses the same method of invention and "corroboration" in connection with a detail of the crucifixion, when he informs us that Jesus' side was pierced by a spear:

> John 19: 34 One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side. . . .

This detail of the spear is found in no other gospel account of the crucifixion, but the author of John corroborates himself by subtly citing another detail (which again has no counterpart or parallel in the other three gospels) namely, that the disciple Thomas thrust his hand into Jesus' side to feel the scar MADE BY THE SPEAR.

But the truth is that the author of John frequently "corroborates" himself and this self-corroboration is carried, it seems to me, to the height of extreme absurdity in the following passage (which follows immediately after the recital of Jesus' crucifixion and the piercing of his side with the spear):

> John 19: 35 And he that saw these things bare record and his record (=testimony) is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. . . .

Whether the disciple John, or another actually wrote this, this in effect is what he would be saying: "I give this testimony and I take my oath that I am speaking the truth, and I know that I am speaking the truth. . . ." We still have only his bare word, and his bare word can hardly be used to corroborate his bare word. Even taking an oath that what we say is true, will not make it true. If what we say is, in fact, NOT TRUE, even a thousand oaths will be of no avail in this respect. Give we our "testimony" a thousand times, it will be in vain, for repetition is of no help either. It is much the same sort of self-attestation as we have already noted in John 21: 24, when we were discussing the problem of the namelessness of the "beloved" disciple:

> This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things and "we" know his testimony is true. . . .

Many Christian scholars now take the position that the 21st Chapter of John is a later spurious addition to the "original" gospel of John and, hedging thus, hope to explain away the "we" of the above passage, but no such saving theory can be applied to the passage in John which we have been discussing, inasmuch as this appears in the 19th Chapter, which is admittedly part of the so-called "original" gospel:

> John 19: 35 And he that saw these things bare record and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. . . .

The author's self-attestation or self-corroboration is only another clever device or dodge by which the anonymous author hopes to win others over—by one means or another—to believe in his purely doctrinal theories about Jesus.

The forger, whoever he was, leaves no stone unturned, no ruse untried, to attain his goal. He hides his own identity and pretends that not he, but an eye-witness wrote the book. He even attempts to support his bare word with his bare word. This is as though one who told a lie, were to take his solemn oath that his lie were true. Genuine corroboration must be made of sterner stuff.

It is this same sort of subtle corroboration too which is used by the author of John where the incident of the miraculous draught of fishes is related. We are "told," you will recall, that the incident occurred AFTER Jesus had died. Therefore—we are supposed to infer—it must be indeed true that he "rose" from the dead, and that his bodily resurrection took place.

But if we so conclude, our conclusion is wrong because unfortunately for the author of John, as we have seen, the same incident had been narrated differently by Mark, and Matthew, and Luke, and their record still remains. Each one of these three other gospel writers gives us his contrary assurance and testimony that the episode occurred WHILE JESUS WAS ALIVE and that it occurred very early in his earthly career as a preacher; as a matter of fact, they tell us it occurred when Jesus "called" his first disciples.

The cunning used by the unknown author of John, though ingenious, sooner or later betrays itself. A man cannot pile lie upon lie, and fabrication upon fabrication, and forgery upon forgery, without slipping up many times. His web of deception becomes so tangled that even he cannot escape being ensnared by its threads. It is as though a spider, intent on perfecting a too symmetric pattern should trap himself.

One instance where the author of John clearly trips himself up in the complex skein of his own making is the purported admonition by Jesus (not found in any of the other gospels) that the disciples should not touch him:

> John 20: 17 Touch me not: for I am not yet ascended to my Father. . . .

We are not given any explanation why contact with Jesus should be avoided before his "ascension" and as a matter of fact, only a few verses later, the author of John contradicts himself, by relating that Jesus actually invites contact (so "anxious" is the author to corroborate the spear episode, he forgets the admonition he has just put into Jesus' mouth):

> John 20: 27 Then saith he to Thomas, behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side. . . .

Jesus was addressing the disciple Thomas, called Didymus. Let it be noted that Thomas was one of Jesus' twelve original disciples who yet adamantly refused to take the word of the other disciples when they informed him Jesus had appeared to them after his crucifixion. His refusal to take their bare word shows, if nothing else, how little HE trusted their testimony, even though he lived or associated with them on a basis of relative intimacy.

Yet we of the Twentieth Century, who did not know these men intimately or at all, and cannot judge, by close observation, what sort of men they were—how trustworthy, how gullible and so on—we, as I say, are expected to take their bare and unsupported word as "gospel," and are asked to accept their strange and incredible narrations as God's Word, when apparently one who knew the disciples intimately WOULD NOT. Besides, we get the disciples' testimony at second hand, through the gospellists, (none of whom were actual eye-witnesses), whereas Thomas would have had it directly from the purported eye-witnesses themselves.

Thomas' refusal to believe his fellow-disciples is Peter's denial of Jesus all over again. Certainly had Peter witnessed the multiplicitous demonstrations of Jesus' miraculous power—demonstrations plainly recorded in the gospels—he would not have denied Jesus. It is far and away too incredible a tale to believe. And Thomas' "doubt" would be equally incredible.

In order to convince Thomas (John tells us) Jesus invited him to "behold" the nail-holes in his hands, and feel the scar of the spear thrust. That these evidences should have remained on his body after his purported resurrection seems strange, because it would seem to argue or indicate that in resurrection we shall carry the scars of our lifetime, the scars, alas, of violence, accident and mayhap, age. For this reason alone, would it not be better to believe in a spiritual resurrection rather than a bodily one as John pretends?

Furthermore it would seem manifestly unfair on the part of Jesus (or if you will, God) to have provided these absolute proofs to Thomas and yet denied direct proofs of ANY kind to all the generations of men since then. If we are expected to "believe" on blind faith, why was not one doubting disciple, one "doubting Thomas"—as an example to us—asked to do so?

And Thomas, be it remembered, like the Peter of our Chapter One, had already witnessed countless miracles prior to the occasion of his doubt, so that belief in this further miracle should have come easy. On the other hand, WE have not had his ample "conditioning" to the miraculous, and belief would naturally come harder to us. Having witnessed the miracles Jesus had performed during his lifetime, Thomas should have been fully prepared or had an enthusiastic readiness to believe this miracle of Jesus' resurrection. That he doubted, argues eloquently that the other miracles never occurred, just as Peter's denial is equally eloquent.

As you may well imagine, Bible scholars saw the difficulty arising from the fact that John 20: 17 ("touch me not") contradicts John 20: 27 ("reach forth thy hand and thrust it into my side"), and diligently went to work to examine the propriety or correctness of the translation of these contradictory passages.

They discovered that "touch me not" might better be translated or rendered "cease touching me," just as other Bible scholars discovered that the rendition of Jesus' words "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17: 21) would by all odds be more accurately translated "the Kingdom of God is in your midst," which gives the phrase an entirely different meaning. And it is too bad too, because the idea that "the Kingdom of God is WITHIN" expresses a greater and more profound spiritual truth. However the translation which scholars favor fits more naturally with Jesus' mistaken expectation of the "physical" advent of the Kingdom, which he felt would occur in his own generation. This was the sincere but mistaken notion we examined at some length in Chapter One.

But the discovery of scholars regarding the phrase "touch me not" does not overcome the basic difficulty of the original context of John 20: 17:

> Cease touching me (instead of "Touch me not") for I am not yet ascended. . . .

We STILL are not told what the "touching" of Jesus has to do with his "ascension," and this is the primary difficulty, the Gordian knot, of this passage. True, translating Jesus' words thus seems to eliminate the contradiction in verse 20: 27, but John 20: 27 STILL verifies Thomas' refusal to accept the testimony of the other disciples and this is far more crucial and significant than the seeming or actual contradiction of the two verses.

In short, scholars are often able to overcome or plausibly explain away superficial difficulties in the text, but the fundamental and really important difficulties remain. Also, while scholars might thus have overcome John's self-contradiction, the granite fact remains that John's account contradicts the other three gospel accounts.

Our main concern here should be not so much to solve the problem of John's self-contradiction, as to determine why John's account as a whole, in this passage and elsewhere, is so contrary to the earlier accounts we find in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. For these accounts are so incompatible, so irreconcilable, so entirely different, that either the book of John is wholly fictitious, or, as an alternative, the other gospels —all three—are entirely fanciful and forged and must be rejected as completely inauthentic.

We have already discussed several details in the crucifixion story in John which differ from the account of Jesus' execution in the other three gospels including the spear thrust into his side. After the anonymous author of John furnishes this latter detail, he goes on to tell us that this "fulfills" the Hebrew Scripture:

> John 19: 36 These things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "a bone of him shall not be broken.". . .

The Scriptural passage referred to is in Exodus, where we read:

> Exodus 12: 46 In one house shall it (the passover lamb) be eaten; thou shalt not carry aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. . . .

As we read this verse from Exodus, it becomes quite evident that we are not reading a "prophetic" proclamation. The verse from Exodus is part of a chapter which gives detailed "cook-book" and other directions regarding the selection, preparation, eating and celebration of the passover meal.

The Israelites are told, for example, what those who eat the passover lambs should wear; they are also told that no stranger, unless he be circumcised, shall partake of the meat; they are further instructed that the passover shall be eaten with unleavened bread; and so on.

In the verse quoted above, with which we are presently concerned, the Israelites are carefully directed not to carry the meat of the passover lamb outside the house and are instructed to use caution in handling the lamb, so that no bones thereof shall be broken.

Breaking the bones of the passover lamb might very well have been considered a sign of bad luck in those far-off days, just as in my boyhood—those far-off days—I was told it was a portent of ill luck to break the "wishbone" of a chicken before it was removed from the chicken, which resulted in great care being exercised in its removal whole.

But John pretends that this warning in Exodus to avoid breaking the bones of the passover lamb was a prophecy, which he further assures us was "fulfilled" in the circumstances which he alone of all the gospellists relates. NONE of the details in the following verses from John are mentioned in the three earlier gospel accounts of the crucifixion:

> John 19: 32-36 Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side. . . . And he that saw it bare record and his record is true that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled: A bone of him shall not be broken. . . .

We need not, I am sure, point out what is obvious to any reader, that the Exodian Scripture referred to does NOT say "a bone of HIM shall not be broken. . . ." It plainly states "neither shall ye break a bone of IT. . . ." Nor is the format of the passage in Exodus such as would indicate that it should be interpreted as a prophecy. Nowhere is it stated that the passage is a prophecy, and nowhere is there any hint that the passage is intended to be construed symbolically.

On the contrary the entire chapter of Exodus, as stated above, consists of instructions and directions prescribed for the preparation and eating of the festive passover lamb. To lift one phrase out of its context in such a chapter and label it "prophecy" is as absurd as if we should lift one phrase out of a modern kitchen recipe for apple pie, indicating that before flour is used in the recipe, the flour must be sifted, and interpret this simple instruction as a prediction of a snowstorm. The verse in Exodus literally and clearly refers only to an animal butchered for the passover.

The Passover was instituted, you will recall, to commemorate God's purported "passing over" the homes of all the Hebrew slaves when God cruelly inflicted the final and most grievous plague of all on the Hebrews' Egyptian masters, slaying (we are told) the firstborn in every house in Egypt, to "force" the Pharaoh to permit his Hebrew captives to go three days' journey into the wilderness, ostensibly to worship their God, Yahweh.

I said "ostensibly," because this was not (as we learn) the true purpose of their earnest petition to be allowed to go three days' journey into the wilderness. Actually the Hebrews wanted to escape from their long bondage in Egypt, and the request was a clever ruse. The three days—if their petition was granted—would afford them a head start, whereby they might make their escape good.

Well and good. We must commend their wish to be free of the hard and bitter chores of enforced slavery. But the story takes a sordid turn, when we learn that the Israelites were instructed by Moses to beg and borrow all they could in the way of jewels, gold and raiment from their Egyptian masters and neighbors before they went on their journey into the wilderness never intending to return. Again, well and good, except that God was apparently not only privy to this scheme to rob or spoil the Egyptians but—worse still—He actually abetted their deception and spoliation of the Egyptians:

> Exodus 12: 36 And the Lord gave the Hebrews favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that the Egyptians lent things unto them freely . . . and the Hebrews robbed the Egyptians. . . .

At this point we might well wonder why a God who could apparently bring his subtle power to bear on the Egyptians to achieve His purposes in this instance, could not have prevailed upon them in the same subtle and insidious way to bring them around to agree to release their Hebrew captives in the first place, without having to resort to dire plagues and monstrous cruelty.

One could hardly condone the action of a God who has the power to effect a solution in a gentle and humane way but who arbitrarily has recourse to ruthless brute force to accomplish His will. This is the way of a savage.

I hear some reader murmur that some humans are so stiff-necked and intractable that harshness is the only language that they would well understand. Let us for the moment grant that this is true, and let us assume further that Pharaoh was indeed one of this obdurate and unbending ilk, preeminent in his incorrigible perversity, and grant too that God might be morally justified in wreaking great and unheard-of cruelties upon him. Yet why should a just and fair-minded Deity pour the vials of His wrath not only on the deserving Pharaoh, but also upon the families of thousands of lesser Egyptians who were innocent of the Pharaoh's intransigence and hardness of heart? The savage cruelty and immorality of slaying the firstborn in EVERY Egyptian household fills one with unspeakable horror and unbelief.

We could probably forgive—or even praise—the ingenious ruse used by the Hebrews to effectually slip the leash of their bondage, and we might even forgive (or applaud) their adroit scheme to rob the Egyptians whom they had served so long without adequate compensation. The plot to rob them blind, as the saying is, possesses all the ingredients of poetic justice.

But—and this is a big "but"—we cannot conceive that God (that is, the august Creator of this majestic Cosmos) would enter into such a frankly larcenous and materialistic conspiracy, nor can we concede that it is at all credible that He would stoop to use His great power to warp or blind the judgment of the Egyptians to such an extent that they would lend their jewels and possessions to the absconding Hebrews. We cannot believe that He would actively intervene upon such a trifling occasion, or that He would interfere to destroy the "free will" of the Egyptians, or their ability to use their own judgment upon earthly affairs.

The whole episode of the plagues and the flight of the Hebrews puts God in such a morally degrading light that we cannot accept it as an authentic picture of God, nor can we therefore accept the narration of the episode as His inspired revelation.

We have already indicated in a previous chapter how utterly impossible it is for us to accept AS TRUE the physically horrifying and morally revolting acts and motives attributed to God in Judges, Numbers, and other Old Testament books. The very narration by these books of such acts and motives on the part of God impugns their authenticity and makes it certain that these books could not have been His inspired Word. If we had no other evidence, this were enough, it seems to me, to establish the fact of their "human" composition beyond question.

The passage in Exodus relating the origin of the Passover with its similar indictment of God's motives and acts, merely corroborates the conclusions we suggested in former chapters that men wrote the books of the Old Testament without the supernatural aid of God. Further, if the book of Exodus lacks divine inspiration, as it must, unless we are willing to believe that God is indeed a morally degraded Entity or Being, then it follows that every individual verse in Exodus is without such inspiration.

This would mean that the verse under discussion, (which the author of John claims to be prophetic of Jesus), lacks the very inspiration which would have to be present to qualify it as authentic prophecy in the first place.

This in turn again confirms what we immediately suspected, namely, that the Scripture alluded to by the author of John—being uninspired—obviously does not have, and could not be considered to have, any reference to Jesus whatever.

When we first compared the so-called prophecy in Exodus, "neither shall ye break a bone of IT" with the misquotation of this verse in John, viz., "a bone of HIM shall not be broken," we could detect at once that the Exodian verse was deliberately "paraphrased" so that in its new form, it might be taken to apply to Jesus.

Similarly, in Chapter Four, we saw how the mistranslated Isaiac prophecy of a purely non-virgin birth was used to foreshadow the pretended virgin birth of Jesus; but what the unknown author of Matthew did was not done deliberately, as in the case of "John's" author, but through ignorance, for he did not know that the Greek translation of Isaiah's "prophecy" was incorrect and he probably did not himself invent the story of Jesus' virgin birth either, but was merely repeating a tale (that had gained circulation after Jesus' death) based on similar pagan stories.

The DELIBERATE adaptation of the Exodus verse by the author of John to suit his own purposes and to "corroborate" his own doctrinal beliefs will serve us well to illustrate his method or procedure in providing forged evidence for his unsuspecting readers. It will serve too as an illuminating example of how the pseudo John permitted doctrinal considerations to prevail over factual truth.

To put it simply, if the facts stated by the other gospels did not fit into the "doctrine" he was attempting to uphold or propagandize, then the author of John proceeded merrily to alter the facts to suit the needs of the doctrine. It is as though a scientist, finding that rays of light appeared in his experiment to "bend" when they passed near the magnetic field of the Sun, arbitrarily re-wrote his report of the experiment and stated that they did not so bend, so that his report would support his own pet theory or "doctrine" that light rays always travel in a straight line.

The author of John wanted here to plant the notion in his readers' minds that Jesus WAS the Lamb of the Passover made flesh, or the Lamb of the Passover incarnate in human form, just as in his first forged paragraphs he tried to promulgate the idea that Jesus was the LOGOS "made flesh."

There is, of course, no logical or necessary connection between the idea that Jesus was the "Logos" and the idea that he was the Passover Lamb, any more than there is between the notion that Jesus was the Messiah (or "Christos" in Greek translation) and the entirely different notion that he was the Son of God. Messiah does NOT mean "Son of God," although from early times this was apparently a popular misconception.

The misconception probably arose—and still arises—out of the reference to Jesus as "Jesus the Messiah (or Jesus Christ), Son of the Living God," a method of phrasing which seems to equate the Messiah with the Son of God, as if the terms "Messiah" and "Son of God" were equal and interchangeable. Even the ungrammatical omission of the comma after Jesus in the phrase "Jesus Christ" (which should be written "Jesus, the Christ" or "Jesus, the Messiah") has contributed to this unfortunate and confusing misconception.

To this day we talk of Jesus as Jesus Christ, whereas this is not his name at all. "Jesus Christ" is just the Greek translation of the Hebrew words "Jesus, the Messiah." And in no case does either the Hebrew word "Messias" (or Messiah) or the Greek word "Christos" (=Christ in English) mean "Son of God." On such trifles as a missing comma are religious beliefs nourished.

Having become seized with the idea that Jesus was the Lamb of the Passover, the author of John took some pains to support this notion with forged evidence. We would however be dishonest to say that the idea of equating Jesus and the Passover Lamb was original with the author of John, without first pointing out that possibly the idea of this equation or identification was suggested to him by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

> 1 Corinthians 5: 6 For even Christ, "our" passover, is sacrificed for us. . . .

Needless to say, Paul in this context appears to be speaking of Jesus only in a metaphorical sense.

Having decided to adopt the doctrine that Jesus "was" in literal truth the Lamb of the Passover, the author of John, we may conjecture, cast about to find ways and means to establish the truth of this doctrine. He had to find something in the laws prescribed for the passover lamb which could be woven into his forged story. Not much offered, but John ingeniously saw some possibilities in the phrase "neither shall ye break a bone of it."

He had no doubt witnessed a number of crucifixions at which the legs of those crucified were broken—with mallets designed for this purpose. The mental association of bones broken at a crucifixion with the admonition that caution should be taken not to break the bones of the passover lamb is psychologically comprehensible. But the pseudo John realized that he must furnish a reason for the soldiers' failure to follow the custom of breaking the legs of those crucified where Jesus was concerned, to account for their departure from the established custom. He therefore invented two details not reported in the earlier gospels, viz.,

(1) that Jesus was already dead when the time came to break the legs of those being executed; and

(2) that the spear was thrust into Jesus' side to make sure of his death, in place of the usual breaking of bones;

> John 19: 32-34 Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs; but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side . . . these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken. . . .

But the author of John noticed also, as he read over the other gospel accounts (all of which were available to this Second Century forger) that in all their accounts, Jesus is said to have eaten the Passover meal with his disciples (an event familiar to us as the Last Supper), and that Jesus was therefore—according to them—crucified AFTER the Passover.

This did not quite fit in with the pseudo John's doctrinal theology which was aimed at equating or identifying Jesus with the Passover Lamb. He therefore omits any mention of the paschal Last Supper in his forged account, and pretends that Jesus' crucifixion took place, not AFTER the Passover, but at the very time when the passover lambs throughout the land of Israel were being slain.

The author of John freely and unabashedly re-arranges historical events to suit his doctrinal purposes, for now (he thus subtly informs us) lo, Jesus died as "our" passover lamb! His death is timed in John to occur at what the author considers the proper time to "prove" that Jesus was the "supernatural" passover lamb.

The same doctrinal consideration would explain why the pseudo John, in telling of the meeting between John the Baptist and Jesus, alters the Baptist's words of greeting when he sees Jesus approaching:

> John 1: 29 The next day John (the Baptist) seeth Jesus coming unto him and saith: Behold THE LAMB OF GOD which taketh away the sin of the world! . . .

The Baptist's words in this Johannine passage have no parallel or foundation in the three earlier gospels, and it is evident that these words were deliberately forged by the anonymous author of John and put by him into the Baptist's mouth to lend apparent supernatural or prophetic support to the doctrine that Jesus was indeed "the lamb of God" predestined to be slaughtered on the Passover.

We can now better understand why the author of John took such pains to try to establish in his readers' minds a connection between the passage in Exodus referring to the preparation of the passover lamb ("no bone of it shall be broken") and the manufactured circumstance of the soldiers' omission to break the legs of the crucified Jesus, an omission which of course led to the adducement of the further forged details of Jesus' early death on the cross and the spear thrust into his side, to make the omission seem more credible.

Writing as he did in the Second Century, it is most improbable that the author of John could have had access to any new information not already published or written down either regarding the crucifixion or the first meeting between John the Baptist and Jesus. These events occurred, we must remember, close to a hundred years before the gospel of John was written.

Had such additional information existed at all, it would certainly have been given some publicity during the First Century and would in all likelihood have been alluded to in the voluminous writings, works, sermons, and letters of the early Church Fathers. But not a single reference to these events as John describes them (or for that matter to ANY other passage or verse in John) has yet been discovered in all the First Century Christian or profane writings, despite the most assiduous search on the part of interested scholars.

But are we stretching the long arm of conjecture in our explanation of John's treatment of these apparently historical events, viz., the meeting between Jesus and John the Baptist, the timing of the Last Supper, and the precise day of the crucifixion?

To answer this question fairly, let us suppose that the author of John had no doctrinal axes to grind—no doctrinal purpose to serve—in his presentation of the events. The unknown writer could then have reported that the Last Supper took place after all and at the time given by Mark and Matthew and Luke. Why should he alter his recital of such an insignificant detail unless he had some ulterior purpose?

Again, why should the author of John have changed the DAY on which the crucifixion took place? The event, and not the day on which it occurred, was the important fact to be chronicled. What earthly purpose would the change in the "day" of the crucifixion serve other than the doctrinal purpose cited?

Besides, the pseudo John could just as well have repeated the traditional story of the crucifixion as he found it in the other gospels without adding the new details which he alone provides, details which are useful, it seems to me, only insofar as they tend to substantiate his own doctrinal propaganda.

His deliberate "forcing" of the Exodian verse to fit these new crucifixion details goes a long way to confirm his clandestine doctrinal purpose and underlines his readiness to deliberately invent evidence to support his doctrinal theories.

Need we wonder any longer why John's gospel account differs from the accounts of the other gospellists? They at least appear to be earnestly and sincerely attempting to repeat and report whatever tradition had to say about Jesus but the nameless author of John attempts to deliberately RE-SHAPE the tradition to fit his own preconceived doctrinal picture of Jesus. This is not to deny the possibility of course that the very traditions which Mark, Matthew, and Luke recorded may themselves have been sometimes or somewhat inaccurate, unreliable, exaggerated, or transformed. However, of one thing we may be sure, that if any wholly authentic traditions regarding Jesus remain, they are to be found, not in John, but in the earlier gospel accounts.

It is of the utmost importance, I believe, to establish that the author of John does indeed—in very truth—bend events AND the words of Jesus into a "doctrinal" mould. We want also to demonstrate to the reader beyond any reasonable doubt that the author of John deliberately changed the facts or traditions reported in Mark, Matthew, and Luke and treated these facts and traditions much as the notorious robber or highwayman of Greek legend, Procrustes, is said to have treated his victims.

It is related of Procrustes that he tied his victims upon an iron bed and either stretched their legs (if they were too short) or cut them off (if they were too long) to fit them to the exact length of the bed. As we have already seen, the author of John did quite the same thing with certain purported details of the crucifixion, the scriptural passage in Exodus, the date of the Last Supper, and the "day" of Jesus' execution.

Everything had to fit into the anonymous John's doctrinal pattern, or it was either discarded, cut away or re-shaped. Where a gap appeared in the pattern, the forger provided his own swatch to patch up the gap, inventing details to give his pattern symmetry and intercorroboration.

We have seen, for example, how he invented the detail of the spear thrust into Jesus' side while Jesus hung gibbeted upon the cross, to skirt around the "customary" breaking of the bones of those crucified, so that he could make this circumstance dovetail with the purported prophecy in Exodus which he pretended was "prophetic" of Jesus, though it plainly has reference only to the meat of the Passover.

We have seen too how he wove this manufactured detail of the spear into the episode (in John's 20th chapter) relating a purported resurrection appearance of Jesus. As you will recall, the author of John relates that Jesus invited his disciple Thomas to touch the scar or wound made by the spear, to overcome Thomas' otherwise immovable doubts that he had indeed "risen." This was tantamount to carrying coals to Newcastle because proofs are provided to one who should no ways have required such proofs, he having been already generously overburdened with other proofs of Jesus' supernatural power.

Then, having thoroughly convinced Thomas, Jesus (the author relates) was guilty of the illogical notion that such proof given to one man (and he unneedful of it) should satisfy all men to the end of time, and proceeds to have Jesus intimate that he will deny such verifiable proofs to those who come after:

> John 20: 29 Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet believe. . . .

The reader might be justified in seriously doubting the questionable circumstance of the "scar" in the first place, for as we have previously suggested, it does not seem at all likely that we shall bear with us the ugly marks and scars of accident, disease and age into any resurrection that we may, by the grace of God, be heir to.

The details of the spear and Jesus' invitation to Thomas are again "facts" which are not only carefully fitted into the author's iron doctrinal pattern, but "facts" that were apparently forged in their entirety by the author of John to begin with. These "facts" have no parallel and no foundation in the earlier gospels. They are "facts" only by virtue of the unknown author's bare assertion in John.

The pseudo John's deliberate doctrinal purposes would probably betray themselves with similar or even greater clarity in his retelling of facts which are not facts of his own invention, but facts duly recorded in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. One episode whose narration in my opinion illustrates in a most conspicuous way how the author of John wove his doctrinal tapestry using strands and threads borrowed or extracted from the earlier gospels is the episode of Jesus' "Agony" at Gethsemane.

In Mark's version of the events at Gethsemane immediately preceding Jesus' arrest, we notice how urgently and with what intense anguish Jesus prayed to be delivered from impending seizure and probable execution. He had seen how severely prophets who offended the mighty and the "powers that be" were dealt with. The vision of John's head on a platter was a present warning.

By sharp contrast, in John's version Jesus does not pray to be spared, but instead the author informs us that Jesus CALMLY announces his coming "glorification" by crucifixion:

> John 12: 23 ff And Jesus answered . . . the hour is come that the SON OF MAN (=I) should be glorified . . . now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. . . . Then came a voice from heaven . . . and Jesus said, This voice came not because of me (that is to say, to comfort me or to confirm my action), but for your sakes (for the edification or instruction of those who stood by). . . .

By the Second Century, when the Gospel of John was written, the doctrine that Jesus had come (or been sent) to redeem mankind and the doctrine that his death was the price of redemption was fairly well established in Christian circles. But Mark's account of the events at Gethsemane, as the author of John quickly realized, was inconsistent and incompatible with this redemptive doctrine.

If Jesus had come or been sent on purpose to redeem or save mankind by his "atoning" death, the reader too must be aware that it was neither probable nor consistent with such a theory that he should have prayed so hard to seek to prevent the very thing he had come especially to do.

Also if, as John reports, Jesus said: "I and the Father are ONE" (John 10: 30), and if this method of redemption had been decided upon in the common counsels of the Trinity (Jesus being—according to the then newly developed doctrine—one Person of this Trinity), he would of necessity have had full knowledge of the plan of atonement involving his death by crucifixion. Being cognizant of the plan, Jesus would certainly not have prayed to change the very plan he himself had voluntarily and divinely agreed to carry out. Such action on his part in view of the circumstances would have been wildly absurd.

The earlier version of the "agony" at Gethsemane is carefully re-written in John, to make it more compatible with the Christian dogmas, creeds, and doctrines already accepted and established in the Second Century when the Fourth Gospel was written.

In John's version therefore, as we have pointed out above, Jesus no longer prays to be spared from what the future holds. Such a prayer, the author of John saw clearly, would be violently inconsistent with the doctrine that Jesus had come into the world specifically to die voluntarily, and to rescue mankind by his atoning death. In John, instead of his imploring to be saved from his hour of "passion" and death, Jesus is pictured as looking forward to this hour with "divine" calm.

Contrast the matter-of-fact cogitations in John with the earlier account of Jesus' words in Mark, words filled topful with heart-rending anguish:

> Mark 14: 36 Take away this cup from me . . . !

In Mark, Jesus' prayer is the humble and earnest supplication of one who does not recognize himself to be a co-equal with the ONE he is addressing. But the author of John, on the other hand, has Jesus claim full co-equality with God; as witness:

> John 10: 30 I and the Father are ONE. . . .

The passage in Mark (10: 18) where Jesus rejects the appellation of "good" Master signifies clearly that Jesus did NOT claim to be God or God's Co-Equal, in goodness at least. Of course, by the time John was written, the early Christians had already re-decided matters for Jesus and had decided—despite Jesus' own testimony to the contrary—that he was God after all, or at least His Co-Equal.

They had also decided—despite Jesus' complete silence in the matter—that he had come to atone by his death for man's purported disobedience to God, a disobedience narrated (we are told) in the Genesis story of Eden. But as we have seen in an earlier chapter, scholars and research students have long since demonstrated that this Eden story and other Genesis stories (like the story of the Flood and the story of the Tower of Babel) are not based on historic fact but are drawn from ancient mythologies and derive not from God's revelation, but from the writings of the Babylonians, Sumerians, etc.

However much we would like it to, a myth, which is a mere product of man's imagination, simply cannot serve as the foundation stone of any religion which pretends to be realistic, or which claims that its doctrines are true. When the early Christians seized upon the Eden disobedience myth and made it the cornerstone of their doctrine regarding Jesus, and tried to explain thereby the reason for his coming and the reason for his death, they made a serious error, an error which invalidates the traditional dogmas of Christian doctrinology, and vitiates or nullifies the Christian scheme of salvation.

To return to Gethsemane, Jesus is represented in Mark as being in deep mortal anguish, an anguish so deep that a later Christian writer, catching the spirit of Mark's narration of the "agony," describes his emotion in the stirring words we now find (by interpolation) in the book of Luke:

> Luke 22: 44 And being in an agony Jesus prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. . . .

The passage may be the origin of the strong phrase of today viz., to "sweat blood" with all its savage emotional connotations. Actually the words in Luke 22: 44 do not appear in the earlier texts of Luke and, as we have indicated above parenthetically, were "interpolated" or forged and added to Luke in a later century. We call attention to this as another example of the manifest and undeniable forgeries which exist even in the earlier gospels.

In any case the Gethsemane scene we find in John has an entirely different emotional climate than Mark's emotion-packed Gethsemane scene. In John, Jesus does not ask to be spared. He merely calmly inquires whether, under the circumstances, it would be proper for him to ask to be spared, which is quite another thing:

> John 12: 27 What shall I say? (Shall I say) Father, save me from this hour?

It is as though the author of John were thinking aloud: What WOULD Jesus (if he were divine or sent of God) be likely to say in this situation? Would he ask to be saved? The pseudo John answers his own question: Of course not! Such a petition would be absurd because for this very reason (viz., to die) Jesus had "come" according to the doctrine of atonement, the pattern of which the early Christians had worked out, weaving it upon the loom of ancient myth and legend. Never had Niobe used thread so tenuous and fine, never had her skill been called upon to finish a pattern so intricate and ingenious, and so deceptive withal.

In John, Jesus is portrayed as looking forward to his arrest not as to an hour of trial, but rather as to an hour of triumph. This is quite a turnabout:

> John 12: 23 And Jesus said . . . the hour is come that I (the Son of Man) should be glorified. . . .

In John, there is a crescendo of quiet triumph in his voice, not the piteous tremolo of fear, which we find in Mark:

> Mark 14: 36 Take this cup from me! . . . Nevertheless, not what I will, but what THOU wilt. . . .

Though he submits to face the dark hour, if need be, the undercurrent of cold fear grips him. It is important too that we should detect in these words of Jesus in Mark (as well as in his words in Matthew and Luke bearing on this episode) the voice of supplication, and not the attitude of one who is talking to an "Equal" in power and will, as Jesus' words in John suggest.

It is evident that in the earlier gospel accounts, Jesus is not communing with himself or an "Equal." In Mark 14: 36 Jesus says "All things are possible to THEE" clearly implying that all things are NOT possible to the petitioner, Jesus. And again in the same verse "not what I will, but what THOU wilt," implying a submission of his will to God's will, even though what he, Jesus, might "will" may be at variance with what God wills. Matthew records the same dark emotions as Mark:

> Matthew 26: 36 ff Then cometh Jesus with them into a place called Gethsemane . . . and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death . . . and he fell on his face and prayed. . . . O my Father . . . let this cup pass from me! . . . nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. . . .

A vulture of fear is clutching at Jesus' heart, tearing at his throat. He is filled with an overwhelming heaviness and sorrow. He falls on his face, as a humble suppliant would in the presence of a vast Superior. There is certainly nothing of the co-equality with God, which "John" claims for Jesus, manifested in this scene.

Only in John's version of Gethsemane do we learn that after Jesus' calm announcement of his coming "triumph" or "glorification" on the cross, a supernatural VOICE was heard from Heaven. Such a voice is not reported by Mark, Matthew, or Luke on this occasion.

> John 12: 27-30 (Jesus is speaking, or so the author of John pretends): For this cause came I unto this hour. . . . Then came a voice from heaven . . . and Jesus said, this voice came not because of me but for your sakes. . . .

In other words, the Heavenly VOICE which John alone reports did not speak—the author of John tells us—for Jesus' benefit because (as the author implies) Jesus did not require any confirmation from Heaven because he was already fully aware of the part he was to play in the divine plan of atonement. No longer is Jesus ignorant of the PLAN as he is in Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

In John, we are assured by the Master Forger that Jesus knew that the enactment of this dark—or triumphant—hour was the reason for his "coming." In the earlier gospels he apparently knew nothing of this purpose or plan and therefore earnestly prayed to be delivered from the EVIL that threatened, and did not regard it as an hour of triumph or glorification, as we are told he did, by the author of John.

Why are the "facts" or details of the Gethsemane episode presented so differently in John? The answer, I believe, is obvious. The author is reshaping the details to fit his Procrustean bed of iron dogma. He sees that neither Mark's version, nor Matthew's, nor Luke's, supports the dogma or doctrine of voluntary atonement, nor the dogma or doctrine of Jesus' divinity.

But instead of discarding the arbitrary dogmas dreamt up by his Christian compeers and predecessors, as any honest man would have done, the pseudo John ALTERS the "facts" to fit the dogmas. This is ever the method of the propagandist who is not at all interested in telling the truth but who wishes above all else to make others believe as he does, (like the trained Communist of today) and twists the truth unmercifully until it fits his belief.

In regard to some details of his version, the author of John is indebted (in a way) to the earlier gospel writers. For example, Mark himself tells of a supernatural VOICE speaking to Peter and the others in the Transfiguration scene (See Mark 9: 7). This VOICE, Mark intimates, was the voice of God. And even though Peter heard it plainly, he nevertheless "denied" Jesus AS IF HE HAD NEVER HEARD IT.

The miraculous healing at Gethsemane of the arresting officer's ear, severed by the sword carried by one of Jesus' followers, has already been referred to. Mark's early account of the event, you will recall, contained only the simple statement that the ear was cut off (Mark 14: 45). But by the time Luke wrote his gospel (near the end of the First Century), the miracle of the ear's restoration had been ADDED, contributing, as we have seen, to the gradual dehumanization of Jesus and his transmutation into an entity of divine or near divine status.

It is notable too that Mark's early account of Gethsemane contains no suggestion that Jesus could or might work a miracle to evade arrest, but by the time Matthew was written (85 A.D. or thereabouts), this suggestion was firmly incorporated in the narration of the incident:

> Matthew 26: 53 (Jesus is speaking, according to the unknown author of Matthew): Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and he shall presently (i.e., immediately) give me more than twelve legions of angels . . . ?

We again find in this passage the addition of the miraculous element to an originally simple story in Mark, this time BY SUGGESTION. A further doctrine was aborning or evolving, viz., that Jesus had voluntarily submitted to arrest. This doctrine crystallized in John. And because it would be inconsistent with the doctrine to report that Jesus was "betrayed" by the kiss of Judas, the author of John does not even mention this incident, although it is reported by all of the other three gospellists:

> Mark 14: 44-46 And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he. . . . And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to Jesus and saith, Master, Master; and kissed him. And they laid hands on him and took (=seized) him. . . .

In this Marcan passage we are told of an actual betrayal and a forcible seizure, not the voluntary surrender related in John. The Matthew account is identical with Mark's, word for word; and Luke's version also similarly narrates the kiss of betrayal. The unknown author of John had the temerity to deliberately alter this story and, by implication, set up the claim that his version of the events related was the correct or true one, and that the other three gospel writers were all lying in their teeth.

In John, we are given to understand that Jesus was NOT betrayed: according to John, Jesus gave himself up quite voluntarily. It was of course far more consistent with the doctrine of atonement that Jesus should yield up his person willingly rather than under the forcible constraint of bailiffs or men. The author of John was trying to establish evidence for the doctrine of atonement regardless of how he had to twist or mangle the facts of the earlier gospel tradition to achieve this forged "proof." Listen to John's version:

> John 18: 4 Jesus therefore, KNOWING ALL THINGS THAT SHOULD COME UPON HIM, went forth and saith, Whom seek ye? They answered, Jesus . . . and Jesus said, I am he. . . . (There is here no kiss of betrayal to identify Jesus to the arresting officers and no forcible seizure.)

When Jesus said "I am he," we are told by the Master Forger of John that the arresting officers were supernaturally stunned and actually knocked to the ground by some miraculous force. This imports into John's account the clear implication that Jesus could have avoided arrest had he chosen to do so.

Now, apparently, according to John, Jesus did not need even one of the twelve legions of angels to come to his aid, which were the boast of Jesus in the Matthew account. John clearly "assures" us that Jesus could—with his single arm and power—have walked away scot-free, felling, like a First Century comic-strip "Superman," any who stood in his way.

It is my earnest wish to have the reader observe for himself how the simple, touching story of Gethsemane in Mark (the earliest gospel) is enlarged upon by the intermediate gospel-writers (Matthew and Luke), and then, after the close of the First Century, altered altogether by the author of John.

There is no miraculous healing of the ear in Mark's account as in Luke's; no suggestion that Jesus could (if he wished) evade arrest as there is in Matthew's version; and no supernatural felling of the arresting officers as in John's gospel, not to mention the supernatural

VOICE and other matters. And whereas in Matthew, Jesus merely boasts or SAYS that he could avoid arrest by calling legions of angels to his assistance, in John Jesus is made by the Forger to actually perform an ACT that ostensibly stands as proof positive (albeit forged proof) that he could indeed have evaded arrest:

> John 18: 6 As soon as he said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground. . . .

The author of John then has Jesus "bargain" with the arresting officers. He has Jesus offer to go willingly with them, but in return they must agree "to let the others go." But he need not have bargained for his disciples' immunity. The officers, it appears, had no choice but to consent to any arrangement Jesus demanded under the circumstances, for had they not been rendered helpless?

One might well question even the probability of the entire incident in John: would you or I, for example, venture to arrest a man who had just stunned and felled us by a display of supernatural power? The same objection of improbability would of course apply to Matthew's "spruced up" account, for does it seem at all likely that the priest's servitors in Matthew's version would have proceeded with the arrest of Jesus after beholding his miraculous restoration of the severed ear?

Mark's account, which is by far the earliest gospel—from which Matthew's miracle of healing and John's display of supernatural power are absent—would seem to be probably more authentic not only by virtue of its much earlier composition and publication but also because it is far and away more credible, being less alien to our experience.

Similarly, the Marcan tradition of Jesus' "agony" at Gethsemane is probably more authentic, and again, is certainly more believable than John's Second Century trumped-up version. Jesus' "divine" and detached calm in the face of impending arrest and execution is a later development of the Gethsemane episode, a sort of "doctrinal" upholstering of the incident, to provide manufactured evidence for the Christian dogma of atonement.

Such doctrinal upholstering of events makes the truth difficult to come by, and makes for endless division and schism, for example between Jew and Christian, and even between Christian and Christian, and tends to divide men of good will and honest purpose into many hostile camps.

We could of course, if we would, clear the board by discarding these divisive dogmas and creeds that keep us fettered, each to his own pillar of intolerance, by recognizing that essential religion is not so much a system of dogmatic beliefs and rigidly prescribed rituals, but rather belief in the validity of ethical values, involving the practice of tolerance, the maintenance of an open mind in our search for religious truth, and the pursuit in our lives of the highest ethical values.

In such a view of religion, which I believe is a just and rational view, what possible difference could it make to God whether we believed that Jesus was a man rather than His divine son, as some dogmatically or even fanatically insist? Certainly in God's eyes, a person's belief in Jesus' divinity would not, of itself, make that person a better person, unless that belief was also accompanied by the more important belief in ethical values and an earnest endeavor to realize these values in his life.

There are still other puzzling aspects to the Gethsemane episode, including one already referred to, namely the fact that one of Jesus' disciples was armed. Actually more puzzling is Jesus' failure to rebuke this disciple severely if not for carrying a sword, at least for using it to smite his fellow-man. All that Jesus says after his disciple has severed the officer's ear is:

> Matthew 26:52 Put up again thy sword in his (=its) place. . . .

Even this mild remark may not be authentic because according to Mark, Jesus made no reference at all to the sword used in his defense. The remark which the book of Matthew attributes to Jesus may be a remark of the author Matthew's own invention. The author of Matthew may have thus long ago reflected on the incongruity of Jesus' omission to reprove his disciple and thought in some faint degree to supply this deficiency by inserting these words.

Another facet of the Gethsemane story that puzzles readers of the gospels is that the authors of these gospels are able to report—apparently verbatim—the words of Jesus' prayers. For one thing it is doubtful that the disciples were within hearing distance. But even assuming that they were close enough to Jesus to hear what he said, how could they hear his words if they were asleep as the gospels tell us?

> Mark 14: 35-37 Jesus WENT FORWARD A LITTLE and fell on the ground and prayed (the words of his prayer follow). . . . And Jesus cometh and findeth the disciples sleeping. . . .
>
> Matthew 26: 38 Jesus saith . . . tarry ye here . . . and he WENT A LITTLE FURTHER and fell on his face and prayed (the words of the prayer follow) . . . and Jesus cometh and findeth them asleep. . . .

> Luke 22: 41 And Jesus was WITHDRAWN FROM THEM ABOUT A STONE'S CAST, and prayed . . . and when he rose up from prayer and was come to his disciples he found them sleeping. . . .

If the disciples were asleep as seems likely if we can trust these gospel reports, even if the disciples were within earshot of his words, they certainly could not have heard his exact words. In connection with this puzzling aspect of the Gethsemane episode, the scholarly and orthodox Interpreter's Bible makes the following very pregnant comment (the caps are mine):

> It has been thought that Jesus must have told them later the contents of his prayer BUT WHEN WAS THERE TIME FOR THIS . . . ?

Jesus was hurried off after his arrest, tried, held in custody and executed. Precious little opportunity was afforded him to tell his disciples anything.

Both Matthew and Luke, as we can see in the three parallel gospel citations given a few paragraphs above, copied Mark's account of the event almost word for word—another verification of the fact that both Matthew and Luke had to depend entirely on Mark for their information concerning biographical events in the life of Jesus. And I need not remind the reader that the man whose account they copied was himself not an eye-witness, but that his information was admittedly received at second hand.

I mention this again only to illustrate the tenuous thread on which the authenticity of the ENTIRE gospel tradition hangs, a tenuosity that has prompted some scholars to question the validity of the tradition altogether.

My opinion is that in spite of the forged additions and unwarranted interpolations, in spite of the legendary and mythical accretions, in spite of the fanciful enlargements and even unintentional exaggerations, in spite too of the careless or erroneous transcriptions of the text, the Mark gospel preserves at least SOME authentic traditions of the man Jesus.

These authentic traditions regarding Jesus are sometimes so embroidered with legend, so interwoven with fictions, and so shot through with misapprehensions that it would be without a doubt a Herculean task to attempt to separate out the mingled strands, and declare with any assurance that thus much is true, and thus much false. But when the light is right, the strands reflect the portrait of a man of strong and noble but nonetheless HUMAN personality.

Before leaving Gethsemane, we might call the reader's attention to one other puzzling or glaring inconsistency in the "agony" episode as it is recounted by Luke:

> Luke 22: 43 And there appeared an Angel unto Jesus from heaven, strengthening him. . . .

Let us reflect a moment on this passage. Here we are told that one "Person" of a purportedly Divine Trinity, one member of the Godhead or, if you like, God Himself incarnate in Jesus, was being "strengthened" (which is to say, was being given strength to bear up) by an angel—by an angel, mind you: God being given strength for His ordeal by one of His own created minions!

Happily for our sanity, it has been discovered by Bible scholars that the verse (Luke 22: 43) above quoted is a later addition to Luke, a forged interpolation like the many other forged additions to the gospels mentioned in Chapter Five and elsewhere. But those who insist on the Bible's complete accuracy and infallibility, or insist that the Bible is supremely true Divine revelation are faced in this passage (as in countless others) with a difficult dilemma.

If they admit the possibility of such forged additions in what purports to be God's word, or in what passes as God's word, they would then be forced to concede that ANY passage in the Bible may be similarly counterfeit. On the other hand, if they insist that such forged interpolations are impossible in spite of what research and scholarship have revealed, then they must insist that this passage in Luke is genuine.

But what Luke 22: 43 tells us is wildly incredible. The idea that God or His Incarnation could be "strengthened" by a mere angel (an entity of His own creation); or that such "strengthening" was NEEDED in the first place is madly absurd, and incredible to the nth degree. We must conclude that whichever horn of the dilemma we choose, it is fatal to the dogma or doctrine that the Bible is God's Word, or the further doctrine that Jesus was God in any sense of the word.

But enough of Gethsemane, and of John's "doctrinal" treatment of the events which purportedly took place in this valley or garden. It should be called to the reader's attention however that even before the Twentieth Century, before the findings of modern research were available, it was widely and clearly recognized by earlier orthodox Christian scholars that the purpose of the author of John was doctrinal rather than biographical (that is to say, that his purpose was to promulgate propaganda rather than relate historic truth):

> The object of the other evangelists was mainly to give a history of Jesus; John's object was mainly to develop his theological system. . . . John narrated . . . (biographical) incidents to be sure, but he did so FROM A DOCTRINAL POINT OF VIEW (my caps). . . .
>
> —*Self-Interpreting Bible, Volume 4.*

The work from which this quotation is made was a many-volumed Bible commentary compiled by a group of recognized Christian scholars of orthodox views, and was published in 1895-6. So we see that the idea that "John" is unreliable as far as the biographical truth about Jesus is concerned, is neither new nor for that matter is it "heretical."

The monumental Twentieth Century Commentary on the Bible, outstanding in its field, is the Interpreter's Bible. It too is an organ or oracle of Christian orthodoxy, prepared, written, and edited by probably the most brilliant aggregation of orthodox Christian scholars in the modern world. Even these orthodox scholars are obliged, by their integrity and respect for truth to report that, as concerns John's interpretation of Jesus as the Passover Lamb, which (they say) some attribute to his following Paul's lead in this interpretation, and

> . . . Others think that in this matter, DOCTRINAL CONSIDERATIONS have prevailed over historical accuracy for John. . . .
>
> —*Volume 8, p.* 448

When "doctrinal considerations" prevail over historical accuracy, it signifies, when we have cleared away the web of polite verbiage, that John is deliberately falsifying historical (or biographical) events for the sake of promoting his doctrinal views. When we so understand the author's basic doctrinal purposes, his gospel becomes to this extent comprehensible, even though we can see that it runs contrary in every possible respect to what must surely be regarded as the more authentic tradition of Jesus found in the earlier gospels.

Up to this point we have seen, by a number of illustrations and typical examples, how ordinary biographical events in the life of Jesus were changed in John to such an extent that this Fourth Gospel version of these events flatly contradicts the composite account given by the three earlier gospellists. Actually John's account differs so completely from theirs that it would be impossible or absurd for us to declare their version authentic without at the same time declaring his version fictitious or forged.

In its commentary on the Gospel of John, the scholarly (and orthodox) Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Volume 6, significantly remarks (the caps are mine):

> The fact is that the narrative in Mark and the narrative in John CANNOT BE MADE TO AGREE except on the supposition that ONE OR THE OTHER is, as regards objective facts, inaccurate and misleading. . . .

In other and plainer words, ONE or THE OTHER is forged. A spade is a spade, however subtly we may otherwise attempt to describe it, or however much we may discreetly avoid calling it a spade. A little further on we read:

> One possible explanation is that the Gospel of John is NOT history (that is, it is NOT a true narration of facts) but something else cast in a historical form. . . .

That "something else" which the book of John is, be assured, is a masterpiece of doctrinal propaganda or a forged gospel masquerading as a biography of Jesus.

In passing, and merely as a curiosity, I might mention that one of our standard dictionaries, illustrating the meaning of "repugnance" (in the sense of inconsistency or incongruity), gives the following example of the word's use:

> Repugnance 1. Inconsistency, incompatibility, incongruity, or an instance of it; as, the "repugnance" between the Gospel narratives. . . . .

Apparently, even compilers of dictionaries are so aware of the lack of basic agreement between the Gospel versions that they use this very disharmony as an example—AS AN EXAMPLE, mind you—to give the student of words a graphic picture of the extreme lack of harmony which the word "repugnance" connotes or implies. The repugnance between the gospels is such that the two versions (John's and the composite or "synoptic" version of Mark, Matthew, and Luke) cannot BOTH be correct, and are as repugnant one with the other as the words which Shakespeare, in playful mood, weds in Romeo and Juliet:

> O heavy lightness! serious vanity
> Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
> Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
> —*Act I, Sc.* 1, *lines* 179-181.

On all counts, John's version must be considered the more likely candidate for the reproach of forgery. In the first place, the three earlier gospels, while they may differ in some particulars, stand together and are in substantial agreement with each other, and their composite version differs irreconcilably from the very divergent version in John. John stands alone unsupported by any other witness. In the second place, the three other gospels were all written decades before the gospel of John and are therefore closer in point of time to the events they relate.

In the third place, John is pretended to have been written by one of Jesus' twelve original disciples, namely, John the Apostle: a claim which now even orthodox Christian scholars almost universally feel obliged to reject. The author is therefore on all hands admittedly unknown and the wary concealment of his identity suggests that if he were known his account would be summarily discredited.

The anonymous author puts on the habit of the Apostle and writes under color of his name to gain credibility for his forgery. The introduction of the nameless "disciple whom Jesus loved" adds an element of ambiguity to the attribution of authorship to the disciple John. It opens the door, as it were, but shuts it hard in our face, when we would pursue the identification.

In the fourth place—and this takes in a lot of territory—if Jesus' personality, Jesus' character, Jesus' vocabulary, Jesus' style of expression, Jesus' method of teaching, and Jesus' "doctrine" (the subject-matter of his teaching) were authentically reported in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, then John's version of Jesus' qualities, traits, characteristics, and teachings MUST BE deliberately fictitious or forged. The authors of the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, referred to above, not only do not hesitate to admit such a possibility, but state it AS A FACT:

> The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel IS NOT the Jesus of history. . . .

Or they might have said that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is not the Jesus of the other three gospels, which is clearly and necessarily implied. These orthodox Christian scholars preferred to accept the three earlier gospels as authentic against the obviously unauthentic, unhistorical, false and fictitious Gospel of John.

But bear with me; for not only are Jesus' qualities and the ordinary biographical events of Jesus life altered beyond recognition in John, but the miracles too are treated differently in many significant respects by the unknown author of John.

We have already demonstrated in the miraculous draught of fishes how the author changed this particular story; for whereas in the other gospels the event occurred early in Jesus' ministry, as told in John it is said to have happened after Jesus died, and serves therefore to slyly "corroborate" Jesus' resurrection. This miracle in John is used too as a revelation of Jesus' power, but in Luke it is cited only to account for the call to discipleship of Peter, John and James.

Again, as concerns miraculous events, in the book of John Jesus —and Jesus alone—performs miracles. In the earlier gospels, the disciples are empowered to perform miracles and exercise this power too:

> Mark 6: 7 ff And Jesus called the twelve and began to send them forth by two and two and GAVE THEM POWER OVER UNCLEAN SPIRITS. . . .
>
> Matthew 10: 1 And when Jesus had called unto him his twelve disciples he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out and heal all manner of sickness and disease. . . .
>
> Matthew 14: 29 And when Peter was come down out of the ship he (Peter) walked on the water to go to Jesus. . . .

Sometimes the demons are too much for them, as in Matthew 17: 19, which of course implies that sometimes they could cope with them successfully. Here the "report" of their occasional failure is proof of their sometime success.

To go on, in the other three gospels the miracles are virtually always said to be dependent on FAITH and generally it is the faith of the beneficiary of the miracle's effect. But the miracles which the author of John reports are NOT dependent on faith but are worked solely by Jesus' supernatural power, and as "SIGNS" or demonstrations of that power.

As a matter of fact in the earliest gospel version (Mark), we are told that Jesus did not have the power to perform miracles where faith was lacking, whereas in John there is never any question of his power in this respect, regardless of faith.

> Mark 6: 5-6 And Jesus could there do no mighty work . . . and he marvelled at their unbelief (or lack of faith). . . .
>
> Matthew 17: 20 If ye have faith . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you. . . .

Another remarkable difference between John and the other three gospels as they relate to miraculous healings, is that John does not record a single occasion on which Jesus used exorcism to rid the sick, lunatic, blind or infirm of their "possession" by demons, whereas the other gospels are filled to overflowing with the exercise by Jesus of this power of "exorcism," and the healings achieved thereby. Even the disciples and others who did not follow Jesus had the power of exorcism over unclean spirits, as the story is told in Mark, Matthew and Luke. (See quotations in Chapter One.)

Perhaps the belief in demoniac possession as the cause of lunacy, blindness, and other infirmities, was already somewhat in disrepute in the Second Century, and the author of John wished to avoid any imputation of ignorance being cast upon Jesus. For he had deliberately set himself to depict Jesus as the "Logos" (the Word made flesh), or as the incarnation of Divine Wisdom or as God Incarnate, and such ignorance would be inconsistent or incongruous with either Divine Wisdom or the Divine Nature.

Still another and deeply significant point of variance in the treatment of the miraculous in John as contrasted with the other three gospels, is to be found in the motivation attributed to Jesus in the performance of the miracles. The wonders which Jesus works in Mark, Matthew, and Luke are motivated, we are told, by compassion, but John would have us believe that the miracles were done by Jesus as "signs," or proofs or revelations of his power.

Moreover, in the other three gospels the miracles are generally worked by Jesus in response to the appeals of others, whereas in John they are done—as the anonymous author of John reports them—on Jesus' own initiative, and simply to display his power. Let us look, for example, at the two versions (John's and that of the others) of the miraculous feeding of five thousand with a few loaves and fishes:

> Mark 6: 34 ff (also Matthew 14: 14 ff and Luke 9: 12 ff): And Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude and WAS MOVED WITH COMPASSION toward them. . . . And when the day was far spent (when it was evening) his disciples came to him, saying, this is a desert (=isolated) place and the time is now past; send the multitude away that they may go into the country round about and into the villages and buy themselves bread: for they have naught to eat . . . and they said unto him, we have here but five loaves and two fishes. . . .

All the versions of the miraculous feeding in the three earlier gospels (including the duplicate version in Mark) are in general agreement regarding Jesus' motivation as well as in regard to other details, but now let us hear John's version:

> John 6: 5 ff When Jesus lifted up his eyes and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these many may eat? And this he said to test him for he knew what he would do. . . .

Observe first that in the composite Mark-Matthew-Luke version, Jesus provides for the feeding out of compassion, at the end of a weary day when the multitude is tired and hungry, but in John the multitude is fed ON ARRIVAL ("when Jesus saw the great company COME"), that is to say, when they are still comparatively fresh from home, and not yet wearied by the heat and aggravation of a long day in the wilderness. According to John's way of telling it, there was no immediate need for the miracle, and it is therefore performed with no apparent motive than (as we would say) to "show off" his power.

Observe, too, that the initiative for the miracle in John's recital is in Jesus himself, whereas in the three other gospels it is the disciples who take the initiative, and Jesus, being appealed to by them, is represented as feeding the multitude as an act of compassion or consideration. In no account of the miracle is this clearer than in the second version in Mark (for there are TWO versions of the same event in the gospel of Mark):

> Mark 8: 2 ff (Jesus saith) I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat, and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way; for many of them came from afar. . . .

In John, the miracle is represented as being deliberately planned ahead of time (viz., "he knew what he would do," even though he asked Philip, "to test him," what they should do to feed so many); in the other gospels, the miracle grows out of the circumstances: "when the day was far spent" his disciples come to him, to urge him to send the multitude away so that they might obtain food in the country around; it is only then that Jesus is represented as taking the matter, so to speak, under advisement and performing the purported miracle.

I am not here concerned with the question of the authenticity of the miracle itself, but wish only to demonstrate how different a person Jesus is in John, compared to the quite human and considerate person he is depicted to be in the other gospels.

Perhaps some reader might point out that the difference in motivation and initiative in the narration of the "miracle" of feeding might be the accidental end-result of a free re-telling of the story by John, a mere phraseological mutation; in short, not at all a deliberately slanted re-writing. To resolve any doubts on this score, let us examine another miraculous episode, which shows just as clearly, or even more evidently, the premeditated purpose behind John's deliberately slanted presentation of Jesus' motivation in performing miracles:

> John 11: 1 ff Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that

> Mary which anointeth the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. . . . The sisters sent unto Jesus saying, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard (that Lazarus was sick), he said this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God THAT THE SON OF GOD MIGHT BE GLORIFIED THEREBY. . . .

We are then plainly told by "John" that Jesus delayed going to Lazarus:

> John 11: 6 When he heard that Lazarus was sick, Jesus stayed two days still in the same place where he was (until Lazarus died). . . . Then Jesus said unto his disciples, Lazarus is dead and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there TO THE INTENT THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE. . . .

In the other gospels, Jesus is eagerness itself to give a helping hand and his compassion is represented as often outrunning the plea, but John casts the play differently. He has Jesus deliberately stay away and delay going to Lazarus. He is pictured as staying away on purpose so that he can work the miracle (raising Lazarus from the dead) not for reasons of compassion, but to the end that he, Jesus, should "be glorified" (John 11: 4).

In this passage, there can be no doubt about the conscious doctrinal purpose of the author of John. He has Jesus state plainly that the miracle was performed "that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." He has Jesus declare his motivation. He pulls the strings and lo! Jesus speaks "I am glad I was not there (till after Lazarus died) to the intent that you may believe. . . ." That is to say, that they may believe (the doctrine) that "I" am the Son of God, by the witnessing of this miracle.

Strange, passing strange, that Peter denied Jesus after—supposedly—witnessing forty such miracles. If as John intimates, Jesus hoped to win belief in this fashion, viz., by working miracles, he was dead wrong. Yet if he were God, or a divine person, he could NOT have been wrong!

Again, the nameless author of John has Jesus deliberately stay away two whole days, instead of rushing to his friend Lazarus' aid, in his time of need. No real compassion is active here, no consideration for Lazarus' sisters' feelings in such a situation, but instead just the execution of a coldly calculated plan of self-aggrandizement. This is not the fiercely human and compassionate Jesus of the other gospels, and if Jesus was the kind of man Mark, Matthew, and Luke testify that he was, he was not the strange UN-human creature of John.

In John, when Jesus is appealed to for help, he turns irascible.

He actually seems to resent such appeals, a circumstance which contrasts sharply with the way he behaves in the other gospels, where he is the very soul of compassion. In John, when Mary (Jesus' mother), merely informs Jesus at the Cana wedding feast that the wine is exhausted, Jesus answers with unbelievable petulance and irrelevance:

> John 2: 3-4 And when they lacked wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him: they have no wine . . . and Jesus answered her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. . . .

Again in John, when a nobleman whose son was sick appealed to Jesus, we find the same irascibility:

> John 4: 47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him and besought him to come down and heal his son, for he was on the point of death. . . .

Here was a man deeply concerned for his son's life and a man with an apparently complete faith in Jesus' power. Yet it is recorded in John that Jesus answered this sincere appeal irascibly and again with strange irrelevance:

> John 4: 48 Then Jesus said, Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe . . . !

Compare the version of this incident in Matthew and observe how the compassionate Jesus of the earlier gospels reacts to the same appeal:

> Matthew 8: 5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented and Jesus said unto him, I will come and heal him. . . .

There is no rebuff, no petulance, no delay, only an immediate, an instant "I will come and heal him." This is the historic Jesus of tradition, not the papier mache Jesus of John.

> Perhaps the most memorable quality which the disciples carried into their later lives about Jesus was his approachableness. . . .
> —*J. R. Sizoo, "I Believe in the Bible."*

This is certainly true of the Jesus of Mark, Matthew and Luke and is as certainly not true of the Jesus of John. We have seen how, when his own mother meekly informed him at Cana "they have no wine," John tells us Jesus snapped at her:

> John 2: 4 Woman, what have I to do with thee . . . ?

Certainly a person who responds to an appeal for help with a rebuff like that implied in the above passage can hardly be considered "approachable" to such an outstanding degree that this quality of all is the one which they who knew him best would remember most.

Whoever it was who wrote the book of John evidently did not know the Jesus of the historic tradition. The picture of Jesus in John no way resembles the portrait of Jesus in the three earlier gospels. One MUST be spurious, fictitious or forged, if the other is genuine.

Apparently by the Second Century the gulf was widening between the very human Jesus of gospel tradition and the newly conceived Jesus of Christian doctrine, and the author of John was desperately trying to show that the two were one and the same. But the Jesus of tradition could not be made to fit the doctrinal mould without losing the very qualities that endeared him to his disciples and early followers.

Observe further how the author of John alters the denouement in the sequel of the Centurion episode. When in the earlier version, after Jesus said he would come to heal his son, the Centurion answered:

> Matthew 8: 8 Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. . . . And Jesus said (after praising the Centurion's faith) go thy way and AS THOU HAST BELIEVED, be it done unto thee. . . .

But John changes this, so that now it is Jesus—not the nobleman—who suggests that the healing be done at a distance:

> John 4: 49-50 The nobleman saith unto Jesus: Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. . . .

Again, John puts the initiative in Jesus and uses the miracle as a revelation of Jesus' power, rather than the product of faith, as in Matthew 8: 8 ("as thou hast believed, be it done unto thee.")

In Matthew, Jesus is merely depicted as performing the miracle at a distance because it is suggested by another's faith. The book of John eliminates the fact that the suggestion and appeal (to heal at a distance) came from another; the author of John is at great pains to portray his Jesus as the prime mover in any miraculous demonstration. In Matthew, the miracle again grows out of the circumstances, viz., the Centurion's feeling of unworthiness that Jesus should be obliged to grace his home with his presence. In John, Jesus directs the circumstances on his own with a brusque "Go thy way, thy son liveth. . . ."

Even in the arrest scene in John, Jesus is represented as taking the initiative. In Mark, Matthew and Luke, Jesus' identity is betrayed by Judas, and he is "seized," but in John Jesus (we are told) does not allow the officers to seize him: instead (according to the author of John) he places himself in their hands. As I have mentioned before, there was no need of a kiss of betrayal in John's forged account, because John wished to de-emphasize the betrayal and forcible seizure, and make it appear that Jesus gave himself up "voluntarily," to harmonize Jesus' action with the doctrine of atonement.

So far throughout this chapter, we have presented many evidences which in our opinion clearly point to the fact that the Gospel of John is a forged document from beginning to end. I would like now to tie up these strands of evidence, to clinch and clarify this imputation of forgery.

In the first place, the Gospel of John, if it is to be fairly judged at all, must be judged on the basis of what—by virtue of its place in the New Testament—it holds itself out to be or what readers of the Bible are innocently and inevitably led to believe it to be, namely, a true, biographical account of the life and words of Jesus, told by an eye-witness.

As we have already indicated, most orthodox Christian commentators now freely acknowledge that the author of John did not write an authentic biography of Jesus, but was making a "dramatic" or fictionalized presentation of what the church of the Second Century had come to believe about Jesus. In other words, the book of John reveals the trends and development of "Christian" theological thought and doctrine into the Second Century A.D., but it has no historical or biographical value whatever because it does not give us any reliable information regarding the life and actual teachings of Jesus.

Now, if even orthodox Christian scholars cannot in good conscience accept the words attributed to Jesus in John as authentic, and cannot accept John's version of the events in Jesus' life as genuine or true, you may be sure that they entertain very serious doubts—approaching virtual certainty—about John's authenticity. It follows too that if we are interested in learning the truth about Jesus, or if we would learn what kind of a man he was or what he actually taught, we must go to Mark, Matthew and Luke. We must reject the "Gospel" of John as entirely untrustworthy for these purposes, and consider it for what it is, viz., a fictitious or forged account of Jesus' life and words.

The fact that the book of John is valuable to ecclesiastical and profane historians, because it shows how Christian doctrine had evolved or changed by the Second Century, certainly can have no bearing on its value to us, because what we are primarily interested in learning is not how the doctrines of Christianity evolved, but whether these doctrines are corroborated or supported by the life and teachings of Jesus.

This is the crucial criterion of the value of the gospel of John, and using this criterion, this Second Century gospel must be considered a fraud or a forgery insofar as it pretends to be a genuine biography of Jesus' life and a genuine record of his words.

The "gospel" of John is to this very day presented to the unwary or unwarned reader of the Bible as having been written by an eye-witness, namely the Apostle John (who was presumably one of Jesus' twelve original disciples), and also as though it were on a par with the other three gospels: that is to say, having equal claim to authenticity as a historical sketch of the life and utterances of Jesus.

The reader is inevitably—and erroneously—led to believe that in John we have a fourth eye-witness account, and if it happens to differ radically and irreconcilably from the other gospel accounts, for aught any reader might guess, this fourth gospel version might be the correct one and the other three all incorrect. This creates an element of confusion which is unfair to the conscientious seeker after the truth about the man Jesus and his teachings.

The fact that none of the other gospels can be considered eye-witness accounts either is besides the point. Those who read the Bible usually regard the gospels, all four of them, as eye-witness accounts, which of course they are not—ANY OF THEM. But the gospel of John so misrepresents Jesus' life and words compared with the story of his life and words which the other three report, that doubt may be thrown on genuinely authentic traditions which these three may have preserved, if John is incautiously regarded as equally trustworthy.

The traditions which the three earlier gospels record and transmit to us are, after all, our only source of information about the man Jesus and his teachings, and this is no less true even though these traditions may be frequently intermixed with legend, overlarded with myth, or flawed with inaccuracy. Perhaps some early church Father felt that three gospels were not quite enough and decided to invent or fabricate a fourth, and of course cast it in the same form and fashion as the other three, and hit upon the idea to attribute its authorship to John the Apostle. Perhaps the reasoning contained in the following quotation from Irenaeus, an early church Father, was widespread, and had to find expression in the forgery of a Fourth Gospel. Irenaeus says:

> It is impossible that there could be more or less than four true gospels, for there are four climates and four cardinal winds. . . .

The absurdity of this kind of "rationalizing" is so evident that it condemns itself. But Irenaeus' comment is significant in another respect. In early times, there were many more gospels than the four we know today but these other gospels were considered forgeries, and denied any place in the Bible. Later these forgeries came to be better known as "Apocrypha" or "uninspired" gospels.

The existence of other "forged" gospels might lead us to wonder whether the four gospels which were actually accepted as genuine might themselves not merely have been SUPERIOR forgeries: that is to say, forgeries executed so skillfully that their detection as forgeries was extremely difficult, at least at that early date, or in those ignorant and superstitious times.

Certainly it now appears that the "fourth" gospel (of John) was just such a superior forgery; and the absurd and legendary elements in Mark, Matthew, and Luke make it more than probable that these gospels too were at least partially forged or fictitious.

The three earlier gospels have however done the world a great and inestimable service by preserving, along with their forged and legendary elements, some authentic traditions of one of the greatest ethical teachers the human race has produced, and have preserved some of his utterances, as well as revealing some of his shortcomings and mistaken beliefs, which we have discussed elsewhere.

In 400 A.D. Fauste, in his debate with St. Augustine, wrote:

> The books called the Evangelists (i.e., the Gospels), have been composed long after the times of the apostles by some obscure (=unknown) men who, fearing that the world would not give credit to (or believe) their relation of matters of which they could not be informed, have published them UNDER THE NAMES OF THE APOSTLES (my caps). . . .

This quotation reveals that 1500 years ago some scholars already were not only suspicious of the authenticity of the Gospels but actually regarded them as outright forgeries. Perhaps in 400 A.D., Fauste may have had additional evidence which has since disappeared, as a result of the systematic censorship and destruction by the early Church of books, etc. containing matter derogatory to or contradicting the doctrines of Christian theology. This censorship and destruction is a matter of historical record.

The author of John thought his forgery was safe, but forgery—no less than murder—will "out." In a sense, forgery is a form of murder, inasmuch as it murders truth. But however overwhelmed, truth cannot be forever kept hidden from the eyes and minds of men.

Unfortunately, honest people are the most easily deceived in matters of religion, just because they want SO MUCH to believe—they want with all their hearts TO BELIEVE. . . . And they do not suspect their pastors or religious leaders of any deception because, like themselves, these dedicated men are, by and large, honest and upright individuals. What they do not realize is that their religious mentors are themselves victims of the very same deception as they. It is altogether a case (as Jesus himself phrased it) of the blind leading the blind, and the clergy are not too much to blame for being taken in. So colossal is the fabric of fraud that even THEY cannot see the forest for the trees.

Briefly to recapitulate, the great difference in Jesus' language and manner of thought and expression as reported in John makes it impossible to believe that this could be the same man as the Jesus who speaks in the pages of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Not only the outward form, but the inner content or essential subject-matter of Jesus' teaching is so radically different in John, that we are forced to conclude that if the message that Jesus proclaimed (regarding the Kingdom of Heaven) in Mark, Matthew and Luke, was in the main accurately set forth, then John's account must be not only inaccurate, but a deliberate fiction (i.e., doctrinal propaganda).

Even Jesus' characteristic method of instruction typified by the use of parables—which is capable of being so plentifully illustrated in the three older gospels—is nowhere to be found in John. No eye-witness could have entirely forgotten the principal theme of Jesus' teaching and have failed to recall any of his outstanding parables. Furthermore, John's narrative of biographical events in the life of Jesus is incompatible (that is, CAN NOT be reconciled in any way) with the chronicle of events found in Mark, Matthew and Luke. Events and details of events are freely and arbitrarily changed by John to conform to the doctrinal theories he is attempting to "prove."

John's version differs widely too, as we have seen, from the other gospel accounts in its presentation and treatment of the purported miracles of Jesus, even to their motivation and raison d'etre (reason or justification for being). The Jesus who performs the miracles in John is definitely not the same KIND person as the Jesus who performs the miracles in Mark, Matthew and Luke.

The traditional Jesus whose aim was ever eagerly and readily to serve is also no longer the same KIND of person in John. Two passages will demonstrate this fact, the first from Mark, the second from John:

> Mark 10: 45 (Jesus is speaking): For even the SON OF MAN (=I) came not to be served, but to serve. . . .

> John 12: 26 (Again Jesus is purportedly speaking) If any man serve ME . . . him will my Father honor. . . .

I will ask the reader to judge which quotation gives a probably more just or a more typical picture of Jesus. In Mark, Jesus declares—if the words are authentic—that he came not to be served, but to serve. In John, the shoe is on the other foot. The difference is fundamental. The two personalities of Jesus presented in the above contrasting passages are poles apart.

The unknown author of John has failed to fathom the deep and warm undercurrent of human kin-ship, sympathy, and good will and dedication to serve which characterizes and colors the words and deeds of the Jesus of Mark, Matthew and Luke, qualities which make him the Jesus we recognize and much admire, the Jesus we esteem despite his human shortcomings, frailties and evident delusions.

Jesus' very tone toward his disciples and his general relations with them is different in John too. According to John, Jesus is distinctly aware of his "apartness":

> John 8: 23 Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world: I am not of this world. . . .
>
> John 3: 31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly and speaketh of the earth; he that cometh from heaven is above all. . . .

From every viewpoint, we are made aware that it is impossible to believe that the Jesus portrayed in the three earlier gospels is the same as the Jesus portrayed in John. When we recognize the gospel of John for what it is, viz., a forgery, the fact is no longer a mystery to us that its version of events, its version of the miracles, its version of Jesus' personality, its version of his manner of speech and expression, its version of his teachings, all run widely counter and contrary to the version given by the three earlier gospels.

Furthermore, the hypothesis of forgery is the only hypothesis that would or could satisfactorily account for ALL the facts. The wide and marked "internal" differences between it and the other gospels make it highly improbable that an apostle or eye-witness was its author. The external circumstances also clearly confirm this improbability. The author's reliance on the former or earlier gospels for information makes it almost certain that he (like the author of Matthew) was NOT an eye-witness: an eye-witness could draw on his own recollections.

Actually of course the gospel of John contains in its text no clear-cut claim that it is written by the Apostle and it seems likely that if it had been written by Jesus' disciple John, the fact would have been plainly stated to insure full credibility and authority for its account. Instead we have seen how warily the author sought to hide his identity in anonymity, yet glancingly or obliquely attributes it to "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

The author could have had no reason for such deliberate ambiguity if his purpose were honest and his account authentic. As far as we can discover, the book of John was attributed to the Apostle John for the first time by Irenaeus in 180 A.D., so that its attribution to the apostle is not based on any authentic historic tradition.

The further fact that the book was a center of warm controversy in the early church would seem to indicate that the early Church Fathers did not themselves regard it as genuine or "apostolic," otherwise it would have been regarded as highly authoritative, and its account accepted as authentic without dispute.

The very emphasis of the protestations and attestations contained in the book which we have already noticed (viz., "he that saw it bare record and his record is true and he knoweth that he saith true" and "this is he that testifieth of these things and we know his testimony is true") might point to current or contemporary doubts of its authentic character, which the author hoped to overcome or combat by such large emphasis and over-solemn attestations.

The fact that the Fourth Gospel is neither quoted from or alluded to by any Christian writer of the First Century makes its "production" by some Second Century writer a practical certainty. Had it existed or been acknowledged earlier as an Apostolic gospel, certainly some writer would have made use of it to support his views or defend his opinions.

Its Second Century composition is further amply corroborated by the fact that the author of John alludes to controversies, ideas and doctrines regarding Jesus that did not even exist during the lifetime of Jesus, and came into being only long after his death. H. A. Guy hints at this in his "A Critical Introduction to the Gospels" when he remarks:

> The bitter arguments between Jesus and "the Jews" (in John) reflect not the conditions in Palestine in the time of Jesus but the controversies with the Jews which the Christians had towards the end of the First Century A.D. . . .

The "Interpreter's Bible" refers to the very same situation in its comments on John:

> In the region where John was written, the church was faced by

> opposition, rivalry and heresy. The hostility of the synagogue CAN BE INFERRED (my caps) from the frequent references to "the Jews" in the polemical discourses of Jesus in Jerusalem. . . .
>
> —*Volume VIII, p.* 437

The constant reference to "the Jews" by Jesus or even by the Apostle John would have been most unnatural, for both were themselves Jews, and nowhere in Mark, Matthew, or Luke is Jesus reported as using this all-inclusive group term to indicate his "opponents," or otherwise. An example or two will show John's phraseology:

> John 2: 18-20 Then answered THE JEWS . . . what sign shewest thou? And Jesus said . . . destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. . . . Then said THE JEWS, Forty and six years was this temple abuilding. . . .
>
> John 5: 10 THE JEWS therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath. . . .
>
> John 5: 15-16 The man departed and told THE JEWS that it was Jesus that had made him whole and therefore did THE JEWS persecute Jesus . . . because he had done these things on the sabbath. . . .
>
> John 6: 41 THE JEWS murmured at Jesus because he said, I am the bread of heaven. . . .
>
> John 7: 1 THE JEWS sought to kill him. . . .

In the other gospels, to be sure, we hear of certain groups like the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the scribes but never are all Jesus' countrymen lumped together in a single category such as "THE JEWS." This all-inclusive term of reference reflects a development of a later time when the Jews as a group were regarded as hostile to Christians.

There is little point in reminding ourselves again that the survival of any Apostle into the Second Century is extremely improbable too. The fact that no record of such survival is extant merely serves to verify this unlikely contingency. Add to this the tradition of John's martyrdom before 70 A.D. and little likelihood of the book's apostolic authorship remains. Without such eye-witness authority, fully attested and confirmed, the book of John must be branded a forgery.

There can hardly be a doubt that John is a purely theological work, and not at all biographical. Unfortunately Mark, the original gospel, upon which the ENTIRE gospel tradition is reared, may itself be primarily a "theological" work too, and perhaps only secondarily or partially a biography. It is certainly true that by the time the gospel of Mark was written (perhaps 65 or 70 A.D.) the "Christian" movement was already well under way, and it was probably already keenly felt that certain nebulous "doctrinal" ideas about Jesus needed documentary support and verification.

For one thing, perhaps Mark wished to establish proof for his belief that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. This would appeal strongly to certain of the Jews, who were of course, the first Christians. If we read Mark with this thought in mind, we become aware that Mark is relating incidents and events which are slanted to demonstrate Jesus' coming Messiahship and the "divinely" derived powers involved in this high office.

The demons whom Jesus is represented as "casting out" are depicted in Mark's very first chapter as recognizing Jesus as "the Holy One of God" (viz., the Messiah) even though the people about him are unaware of his Messianic identity:

> Mark 1: 24 (The demon cries) I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God. . . .
>
> Mark 1: 34 Jesus suffered not the devils to speak because they KNEW him. . . .

The blind Bartimaeus is later depicted by Mark as recognizing Jesus as "the Son of David." For it was believed that the Messiah would come from the seed of David. His Messiahship is again "confirmed" by Mark in the manner of his arrival at Jerusalem (Mark 11: 7) "sitting upon a colt." Zechariah had "prophesied" that the Messiah would come transported thus:

> Zechariah 9: 9 Behold, thy "king" cometh (=will come) . . . lowly, and riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass. . . .

Finally, Mark has Jesus break his long and reluctant silence to proclaim the actual fact of his coming Messiahship:

> Mark 14: 61-62 (the priest asks) Art thou the "Christ" (=the Messiah) . . . and Jesus said, I am. . . .

In short, the book of Mark, while it may contain some historical or biographical traditions regarding Jesus and his words, may be for the most part another "John," created—if not deliberately forged—to provide evidence for theological doctrines which the seedling Christian church wished to affirm or promulgate. Mark's composition several decades after Jesus' death would have provided time for legends to grow and cluster around the name of Jesus, and would have somewhat dimmed the memory of actual events in his life.

The miraculous and marvellous elements in the pages of Mark must be looked upon with grave suspicion without further verification.

Alas, if anything, instead of verification we have quite the reverse in Peter's "denial."

It seems altogether unbelievable, if the miracles had occurred, the miracles which Mark assures us were witnessed by Peter, that Peter could have denied Jesus. It just would not make sense. In any case the verification we seek is certainly not to be found in Peter's actions.

Even the anonymous, unprincipled author of John apparently felt that a miracle should be verified before it is believed in, when he had the disciple Thomas demand verification of the miracle of Jesus' resurrection. And, as we will recall, instead of Jesus suggesting that Thomas demonstrate his faith by BELIEVING WITHOUT VERIFICATION, Jesus hastened (according to John) to furnish the very verification which Thomas demanded. Certainly if Jesus felt that Thomas was entitled to such verification, how much the more would he not have felt that later generations should be entitled to ask for verification of some kind too.

Inasmuch as the authors of Matthew and Luke obtained the major portion of their information directly from Mark's gospel, if it be true that Mark's gospel is tainted with doctrinal propaganda, THEIR gospels would be, almost certainly, similarly infected. For example, by actual count, the information contained in 609 verses out of a total of 662 in Mark is copied into Matthew's gospel, sometimes word for word, and sometimes with slight changes, omissions or additions.

If Mark, then, is primarily theological (rather than strictly historical or biographical), Matthew unavoidably inherits this theological or doctrinal infection, and Luke is of course tarred with the same brush too.

One thing comes through to us with some clarity, as we read Mark, Matthew and Luke, and that one thing is the personality of Jesus. We may also safely infer his basic ideas and teachings, and learn of a few events in his tragic life. The remainder may all be legendary or fictitious, the product of misdirected reverence, or pious fraud.

For the few authentic strokes on their canvas, we are eternally grateful to the authors of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Even the forged gospel of John with its mystic, half-real, un-human and sometimes overbearing Jesus has this virtue that it makes us turn back to the portrait of Jesus in the other gospels with a feeling of gratitude to their authors and an increased admiration for the historic Jesus, the man who was made God.

Chapter Seven: Is Our God an Immoral God?

When Shakespeare wrote "There is nothing either good or bad but THINKING makes it so," he stated what appears upon the whole to be a profound psychological truth: that is to say, a valid statement of a common experience in human behavior. He also provides us with an opportunity, of which we shall avail ourselves later, to illustrate or clarify an equally profound truth in pure ethics.

In the passage quoted, Shakespeare was referring specifically, I believe, to the mental climate in which we pass our conscious lives, or to put it more simply, he had reference to the attitudes we adopt toward things in general. For example, he suggests that if you think of the earth we inhabit as a prisonhouse, why then to you it is most assuredly a prisonhouse.

To carry this thought a bit further, if you think that life is a meaningless round of futility, then for you life will probably be meaningless and dull, flat and unprofitable, a carrousel of painted futility. On the other hand, if you look upon the planet we share as the scene or stage of a great and wondrous adventure, then—presto!—for you life takes on all the zest, glamour and excitement of an adventure. From this, it can be appreciated how all-important mental attitude may be if we are to attain serenity or happiness, or even for creative or other achievement.

In passing, we might comment that our attitudes (or the convictions upon which such attitudes are founded) may not always be completely in harmony with actual reality, but if we proceed on the assumption that they are, we may live out our lives more profitably or more serenely, and we may accomplish what otherwise we could not. At least we have, as it were, made our peace with the world and can focus our scattered energies, which gives us a decided advantage over those who never are quite able to come to terms with reality on any basis. We may even, by sheer contagion, succeed in convincing others that our way of looking at things, or our way of proceeding, even if it does not agree with theirs, or is not obviously correct in every aspect, at least forms a working basis for active living, and is more desirable upon the whole than aimless drift and indecision.

This sort of contagion may incidentally serve to throw a little light on Jesus' relationship with his immediate followers. Jesus' sense of Messianic mission—even if mistaken—was apparently so overpowering, that in its tidal strength it not only swept Jesus himself to moments of grand sublimity, but carried his followers and adherents along with him, till they too became as convinced as Jesus himself was, that he was soon to fill the role of the long looked-for Messias, the Anointed One, who was to usher in a new Kingdom of God on earth.

The idea that a great and terrible "Day of the Lord" was coming was NOT Jesus' idea, but an idea that generations of Jewish prophets or poets before him had developed, and which they had hammered and wrought upon until by the time Jesus of Nazareth was born, there was a considerable literature regarding this dread Day, a literature which described at large and in some detail "signs" and portents that would herald the Day's approach, and which told also of a HOLY ONE of God who should come and "restore" Israel.

This Holy One of God was variously conceived and variously described by the prophets: for example, he was the "Suffering Servant" of the prophet Isaiah, and was called the "Son of Man" by the prophet Daniel. It was also foretold by the prophet Malachi that Elijah (=Elias) would "return" before the great Day of the Lord:

> Malachi 4: 5 Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. . . .

Elijah's return was therefore eagerly looked for as one SURE omen that the end of the world was close at hand. It was prophesied too that, as the LAST DAYS approached, Israel was to undergo frightening afflictions and unheard-of tribulations.

We of the sophisticated Twentieth Century may laugh a little at these predictions of dire prophecy, but "prophets of doom" have been with us always, and they are with us even today. Not many years back, in the Nineteenth Century, a Christian group of relatively small numbers had somehow been persuaded or persuaded themselves that the world was going to end on a certain day. The members of this group proceeded to give away all their worldly possessions, and joyously awaited the End, swathed in their "ascension robes." They were enthusiastically sincere, and thoroughly convinced, but they were mistaken.

One might reflect that Jesus was similarly mistaken, as it turned out, for he too had expected the world to come to an end in "his" generation. He was equally mistaken too when he saw himself as the "Son of Man" of Daniel's vision, and identified himself with the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah's prophetic writings, and again when he cast himself in his mind's eye as the Messiah, destined or predestined to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth, in the "regeneration" which was to follow the LAST DAYS. Jesus is represented as the speaker in both of the following extracts:

> Matthew 25: 31 When I (the Son of Man) shall come in my glory, and all the holy angels with me, then shall I sit upon the throne of my glory. . . .
>
> Matthew 19: 28 IN THE REGENERATION when I, the Son of Man, shall sit in the throne of my glory, ye also (that is, the disciples) shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the (twelve) tribes of Israel. . . .

Judging the twelve tribes of Israel! There was apparently little room for outsiders or Gentiles in Jesus' vision of the Kingdom. Nor did Jesus attempt to hide the prejudice or contempt with which even he—by contagion of the narrow culture in which he was nurtured—regarded Gentiles, as witness the following passage:

> Matthew 15: 24 Jesus said (unto the Gentile woman who implored his help), I am not sent except unto the lost sheep of Israel. . . . And Jesus went on to say, it is not meet (=fitting or proper) to take the CHILDREN'S bread (viz., bread intended for the children of Israel) and cast it to "DOGS". . . .

Orthodox Christian commentators, writing in the voluminous "Interpreter's Bible" frankly acknowledge that such words as those quoted above are "IMPOSSIBLY harsh and unfeeling on the lips of Jesus."

These same commentators suggest that the words as they appear in the Gospel of Matthew are in all probability a product of the prejudices of those who handed these words down to us. There is a clear implication in this suggestion that some words attributed to Jesus may be spurious or forged, even when there is no affirmative evidence pointing to forgery—evidence, that is, of the tangible sort that we have cited in foregoing chapters, where the fact of forgery is consequently clearly and circumstantially established.

While we should perhaps be willing to concede that the harsh and contemptuous words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 15: 24 may indeed be inauthentic, despite the fact that no prima facie evidence of their spuriousness is available—think what this means! An acknowledgement of such a kind would be extremely damaging to the orthodox view that the Bible is the product of Divine Inspiration, for here we have words presumably—and to all appearances—spoken by Jesus himself, which it is intimated are not genuine, but which nevertheless appear in an ostensibly inspired gospel. The conclusion would be inescapable that other words, similarly ascribed to Jesus in the gospels, might be likewise inauthentic.

In fact, under such an arbitrary method of evaluating the authenticity of Jesus' words, each and every word reportedly spoken by Jesus would be wide open to the suspicion that it was fraudulently represented as his, but was not so in truth. In the passage under discussion, the prejudice that it is claimed "might" have put such unbelievably harsh words into his mouth, is a prejudice antagonistic to the Jesus of Christian doctrinal tradition, but would not favorable prejudices probably be operative in far more instances and result in even greater frauds on behalf of the tradition?

As the reader will recall, we found this to be precisely and overwhelmingly true when, in earlier chapters, we examined forgeries in the gospels—forgeries whose existence could be sustained not merely by conjecture or surmise, but by tangible and irreproachable evidence. But there may well have been many more forgeries whose existence is at present undetectible and beyond our present scope of discovery.

It seems to me, however, that it is more than probable that the harsh and contemptuous words recorded in Matthew 15: 24 were quite genuine. If we consider that Jesus was a man, he would naturally be subject to the prejudices of the culture in which he was nurtured. The simple truth might be—and this is in fact confirmed by the Gospel in the passage referred to—that Jesus believed that the Israelite nation was favored above all other peoples by Yahweh. "Crumbs" could possibly be deigned to the Gentiles, but the main course of God's favor was only for the Hebrews.

This unfortunate idea of a favored race crops up again and again throughout the history of man. You will recall that the much and deservedly hated Hitler entertained a similar prejudice about the general superiority of the Aryan race. With Hitler, it was an evil and enduring prejudice, whereas Jesus, as time went on, seems by his "reported" words to have attempted to free himself from the tentacles of this mistaken prejudice. However, in all fairness it must be said that these words of seeming reformation on Jesus' part may easily be as fraudulent and spurious as it is claimed that the harsh words of prejudice expressed toward Gentiles might have been—if we use the same logic by which Jesus' harsh words of prejudice are declared to be "probably" spurious.

Being human, like Jesus we all entertain some of the prejudices inherent in the culture of which we are a part and a product, and we often become so involved in the tangled skein of these prejudices that we never succeed in entirely extricating ourselves from their insidious hold upon us.

In Mark's version of the gospel episode mentioned above, the woman is a Greek or Syrophenician; in Matthew's account she becomes a Canaanite. But the point of the story remains the same. Jesus declares his ministry is intended for the "children of Israel." Moreover, it had to be. He thought of himself as fulfilling the JEWISH Scripture which spoke of a Jewish Messiah, a Messiah who would restore the JEWISH NATION. As we will recall too, because he believed as he did, Jesus specifically instructed his disciples when he sent them forth to proclaim the imminence of the Kingdom of Heaven, that they should NOT enter any Gentile city. Why this instruction, if he came to preach to ALL?

> Matthew 10: 5 These twelve Jesus sent forth and COMMANDED them, saying, Go NOT into the way of the Gentiles and into any city of the Samaritans: but go rather to the LOST SHEEP OF ISRAEL. . . .

Jesus here clearly indicates that he conceived that his ministry was intended to be limited to the Jewish nations. He regarded himself as the Messiah (foretold by Jewish prophecy) who would restore or "save," not the world or the whole of mankind, but Israel.

This is of course contrary to the "doctrinal" teachings of Christian theology; and if these teachings were indeed categorically true, it would probably have been "impossible" for Jesus to have uttered the harsh, unfeeling words which the gospels tell us he used to the Gentile woman who so humbly implored his help. When, however, the "doctrines" of Christian theology are seen to be mistaken, and when Jesus is regarded as a man without benefit of divine wisdom, his religious racial prejudice, with its consequent harsh expression, becomes not only possible to conceive, but rings entirely true to his nurture and religious training.

Jesus' belief too that demons could cause blindness and other disabilities (and that they could be talked to and "exorcised"), would no longer seem so outlandish and so puzzling to us, as it must if Jesus were truly possessed of divine wisdom. Such a belief becomes altogether understandable on the other hand when Jesus is regarded as a child or product of his own generation, because he would then naturally and inevitably share the beliefs common to his times, and would share the lack of enlightenment characteristic of his day and age.

Only Godly wisdom could conceivably transcend such limitations, a wisdom which it appears Jesus neither possessed nor claimed.

Jesus had apparently reflected long and hard upon the prophetic foreshewings or adumbrations of the great Day of the Lord, and of the Holy One of whom the prophets spoke. He thought that he saw definite signs in his own troublous times that pointed unmistakably to the END, and portents that augured the Heavenly Kingdom's near approach. So certain was he that he read or construed the signs aright, that he solemnly and unequivocally proclaimed time and time again that the Kingdom was AT HAND.

Jesus went so far as to assure those he addressed that some that stood before him would not in fact die, but would live to witness the coming of the Kingdom:

> Mark 9: 1 And Jesus said . . . VERILY I say unto you, That there be some that stand here, which shall not taste of death TILL THEY HAVE SEEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD COME. . . . .

These are not MY words, but the words of Jesus—according to the Gospel. Jesus here gravely declares that his generation—the generation of men living in his time—would not "pass" till all things had been fulfilled. His disciples had put a question to Jesus at point-blank range:

> Mark 13: 4 Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled . . . ?

Jesus then proceeds to give them the signs and portents that will unerringly point to the LAST DAYS and the coming of the Kingdom:

> Mark 13: 5-31 When ye hear of wars and rumors of wars, be not troubled . . . for the END shall not be yet . . . BUT (on the other hand) when ye shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Jesus' mind had brooded hard upon the prophets and had taken their mystic communications seriously to heart) standing where it ought not, then let them that be in Judea flee (what good to flee?) . . . In those days shall be affliction such as was not from the beginning . . . and except the Lord had shortened (with the force of "shall shorten") those days, no flesh should be saved. . . . But for the Elect's sake . . . He hath shortened (=shall shorten) the days. . . . (Then), after the tribulation, the sun shall be darkened . . and the stars of heaven shall fall (Jesus apparently thought that the stars were "up" and could therefore fall "down"). . . . Then shall they see me, the Son of Man (Daniel's descriptive title for the great One of God), coming in the clouds. . . . (Now follows Jesus' solemn attestation). . . . VERILY (=truthfully, with the solem-

> nity of a sacred oath), VERILY I say unto you, that THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS TILL ALL THESE THINGS BE DONE . . . (and he affixes a further seal to his solemn attestation) Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away (or fail). . . .

No attestation surely could be more solemn and carry a more perfect assurance that of all things most certain, this was most sure, and could be depended upon though all else were to fail of accomplishment. Such assurance, doubly attested and solemnly affirmed, and sealed in the sight of God, does not demonstrate duplicity on Jesus' part, as some would have us believe, but rather bears witness to the over-powering nature of the conviction which held Jesus in its vice-like grip. Jesus believed with all his mind, with all his heart, and with all his energy and strength, that the END was near.

When therefore Jesus sent his disciples forth to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand, he solemnly admonished them that before they would have had time to visit all the cities of Israel (only the cities of Israel be it noted) the LAST DAYS would be upon them, and he himself would have assumed his role (fated for him by prophetic necessity) as the "SON OF MAN" in the new Kingdom—all this they were taught to expect would occur BEFORE their return could be accomplished:

> Matthew 10: 23 VERILY, I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man (that is to say, I in my new role) be come. . . .

Jesus clearly identified or equated himself in his mind with the "Son of Man" of Daniel's prophecy, the Son of Man whom Daniel had said would "come with the clouds" in the LAST DAYS. With this identification in mind, we can the more readily understand Jesus' reply to the high priest's importunate question:

> Art THOU the Messiah . . . ?

The high priest pressed for a plain answer, which Jesus seemed strangely reluctant to give. But finally Jesus answered:

> Mark 14: 62 I am, and ye shall see the SON OF MAN (which is to say, you shall see "me") . . . coming in the clouds. . . .

The following passage from the book of Daniel should be read in connection with the above, as a footnote:

> Daniel 7: 13 I saw in the night visions, and beheld the SON OF MAN come with the clouds of heaven. . . .

Jesus' mind was prodigiously saturated with the books of the Law and the books of the Prophets, particularly the latter; and he had somehow come to the firm and immovable conclusion that all things pointed to the rapid approach of the LAST DAYS and the great Day of the Lord, and the coming of the Kingdom—IN HIS OWN GENERATION. He was impatient with those who could not see the signs of the times as he saw them:

> Matthew 16: 3 O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky: but can ye not discern the signs of the times . . . ?

In John the Baptist, Jesus descried one portentous sign, namely, the fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi, importing that Elijah—the dead Elijah—would return from the grave before the END; for Jesus taught his disciples that the Baptist was indeed the risen Elijah:

> Matthew 17: 10-13 And his disciples asked him, Why then say the scribes that Elias (=Elijah) must first come? And Jesus answered and said, Elias truly shall first come. . . . BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT ELIAS HAS COME ALREADY, and they knew him not . . . then the disciples understood that he spake to them of John the Baptist. . . .

The words I have quoted above are again not words of MY invention, but the words of Jesus himself, and they constitute a genuine part of the Gospel record. Jesus apparently reasoned that if John the Baptist was—in very truth—Elijah, who (it had been prophesied) was to be the forerunner of the LAST DAYS, then he, Jesus, MUST BE the Messiah, for none other appeared on the scene who could fill this high office but he. Everything—Jesus mused—everything fitted into the pattern of "prophecy." Everything seemed to dovetail, and the slow unmoving finger of fate seemed to be pointed in his direction. He humbly accepted his role, including that of the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah, and the "Son of Man" of Daniel. Everything hung upon the premise that John the Baptist was the resurrected Elijah—and the premise was wrong.

Jesus was an earnest man: when he believed something, he believed it with all his heart. But earnest men are sometimes wrong. He admonished his disciples that days of unheard-of tribulation and sorrow were at hand, and would precede the END and his subsequent IMMEDIATE "return" as the SON of MAN "on the clouds," but assured them that when the "regeneration" (the world's rebirth) occurred, and the Godly Kingdom was established, they would occupy twelve thrones and would judge from thence the twelve tribes of

Israel. (At the time he said this, he apparently had not as yet "foreseen" that one of the twelve would betray him and lose his throne. otherwise he would have declared that only ELEVEN of them would occupy thrones.)

The simple fact is—as we know now, looking backward across the centuries—the world did NOT end in Jesus' generation. Nor did Jesus return "upon the clouds," as he fully expected, as the Son of Man or God's Messiah, to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, an event which he earnestly believed would occur in his generation shortly after the END.

Jesus was mistaken both in his Messianic conviction (his belief that he was to be the Messiah), and in what is eruditely referred to as his "eschatological" expectation (that is, his expectation that the world would come to an end in his own generation). The fact that he was mistaken in these matters has for us—and for doctrinal or evangelical Christianity—many and far-reaching consequences and implications. In any correct evaluation of Jesus' nature, whether he was human or uniquely divine, or in any just estimate of his work as a teacher, this hard-core FACT must be taken into due consideration.

We must of course recognize that if Jesus had not labored under the enthusiastic "delusion" of pending Messiahship, he might not have been so successful as a teacher. Just because of this sincere and firm "delusion," Jesus had heroically to LIVE UP TO the high office he thought was intended for him, ostensibly by divine prophecy. He had to measure up to the epic personal requirements of this lofty Messianic post, in thought, in word, in manner, and in deed. His actions would consequently be geared to how he envisioned a "Messiah" should act: he had to scorn worldly things, and his pronouncements and teachings had to be given with a voice of authority:

> In all his speech and action, the Messianic consciousness (the consciousness that he is the Messiah) shines forth. . . . The beatitudes, nay the whole of the Sermon on the Mount, with the authoritative "I" forever breaking through, bear witness to the high dignity which JESUS ASCRIBED TO HIMSELF (my caps). . . .
>
> . . .
>
> —*"Quest of the Historical Jesus,"* A. Schweitzer

Jesus lived the part, then, which he had come to believe that the Hebrew Scriptures had foreshadowed for him. To erase any possible doubts in the reader's mind that Jesus did in point of fact view many of his acts as a "fulfillment" of scripture, we refer the reader to Luke

4: 16-21, where Jesus is portrayed as reading from the prophecies of Esaias (=Isaiah):

> Luke 4: 17-18 When he opened the book of Esaias, he found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. . . . (These words are taken from Isaiah 61: 1-2)

Jesus then assures the congregation to whom he has read these prophecies:

> Luke 4: 21 This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. . . .

Jesus' belief that he was fulfilling the scripture in his own person may explain his paradoxical insistence that he had come, not to "destroy" the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them—and this in spite of the fact that he often broke with or quarrelled seriously with specific teachings of Judaism set down in the books of the Law, and was highly critical of Judaic religious practices which were an integral part of that Law. Such open criticisms on his part certainly had a destructive tendency, which the priests of his day were quick to realize and therefore sought his destruction instead.

Only at the very end, as he hung dying on the cross, does Jesus seem to have glimpsed, even dimly, the fact that he could have been mistaken in what he had come to believe. But even then he does not actually impugn his own judgment or conviction regarding the prophecies and the conclusions he had drawn from them in relation to himself. Instead he places the onus of the failure of the prophecies' fulfillment upon God.

So full, so flood-tide is his conviction, and so firm, that it is apparently impossible for him to believe that he himself could have been wrong, even though events seem to be rapidly proving him wrong. He is growing weaker as he hangs hour after agonized hour upon the Roman cross of execution and he reflects that for some reason God has forsaken him. Finally an anguished cry is wrung from his lips. The words of this outcry are perhaps the most heart-rending and tragic words ever recorded in man's brief chronicle:

> Mark 15: 34 My God . . . my God . . . Why hast Thou forsaken me . . . ?

This stark, piteous cry of unbelieving despair, of disappointed expectation, as we have demonstrated in a former chapter, would set at naught and confute the claims of Christian doctrinology regarding "Atonement" and "Incarnation," which insist or allege that Jesus came ON PURPOSE to die, and by dying to redeem man, in accordance with a pre-arranged divine PLAN. Only the facts which have just claimed our attention which keep in view Jesus' mistaken beliefs, could possibly account for such a cry of profound despair and pathos. We cannot—we must not—shirk the truth, if we would maintain our peace of mind:

> We must learn that any person who will not accept what he knows to be truth . . undermines his mental integrity. . . .
> —*Luther Burbank*

Faced, as we are, with certain facts THAT CANNOT BE DENIED, facts which the gospels themselves provide or verify, we cannot shrink from the apparent truth about Jesus, if we would keep faith with God, preserve our integrity, and hold our conscience at quiet. We must accept the truth about Jesus, not as we have been taught—lo, these many years—to see it, and not as we perhaps would like it to be, but as the clear and unmistakable evidence in the gospels indicates it to be.

Devotion to truth puts us under a strong compulsion to accept indisputable facts AS FACTS, even though these facts should, in their ultimate ramifications and implications, undermine and destroy the fabric of Christian theology and Christian doctrinology. But if the facts do not sustain the DOCTRINES and THEOLOGY of Evangelical Christianity, does this necessarily mean, as some suppose, that we must reject the noble and humanly valuable ETHICS of Jesus and Christianity as well? Must we, in short, throw the baby out with the bath water? Our answer is, of course not. The doctrines of Christianity are something quite distinct and apart from the system of ethics Christianity has evolved into.

It may come as a surprise to some that a man can live a decent, upright and "Christian" life even though he does not believe in the theological dogma that Jesus was born of a virgin mother, and further that a man can believe in God with as much (or more) sincerity and enthusiasm even though he does NOT believe that the Bible is God's Word, and refuses to accept as valid the doctrine of Incarnation (viz., the theory that God or some unique or mysterious manifestation of God appeared IN THE FLESH on our planet some 2000 years ago).

Not infrequently, in the world about us, we observe that people who do not believe in the dogmas of Christianity (but who may believe in its ethics, by and large) are kindlier, more tolerant, and far and away more humble than those who strictly insist that belief in the total doctrine of traditional Christian theology (with its attendant ritual and forms) is necessary for "salvation."

Ironically, I think that it can be stated that the intolerance, arrogance, and in some instances, the fanaticism of doctrinaire Christianity, have done much to bring not only "evangelical" Christianity but "religion" itself into disrepute. This untoward consequence results because for many people, particularly in an over-all Christian nation like the United States, the Christian religion is vaguely regarded as synonymous with religion itself, and consequently Religion, in its august white mantle, is made to bear the blame for the intolerant acts or arrogant attitudes of doctrinaire Christianity.

In addition, the spectacle of Christians quarrelling or disagreeing among themselves (when they are not actually or bitterly hostile) over conflicting interpretations of the Bible and contradictory theories about Jesus, or over irreconcilable differences in doctrine and ritual, certainly does nothing to further the cause of Christianity, nor does it make any contribution to advance the cause of Religion.

Most Americans who call themselves Christians are of course aware that there are OTHER world religions which, so to speak, "compete" with the Christian religion, and that each of these religions, like Christianity itself, puts forth a claim that it alone is the proponent of the one "true" faith. In most cases however these American Christians are acquainted with little more than the names of these sister religions.

Most of them might therefore be somewhat surprised, if not taken aback, to learn that each of these competing faiths not only has its own system of ethics (broadly resembling the Christian ethic in many important features), but that each also has its own Sacred Scriptures or "Bible" as well. The adherents of each of these other religions venerate their own particular sacred writings as God's "authentic" revelation with as great a fervor as the adherents of Christianity esteem THEIR Bible to be His revelation.

Tom Paine, one of the intellectual stalwarts of the American Revolutionary period, makes no bones about expressing his opinion regarding these various Bibles, in his provocative book, titled "Age of Reason":

> Each (of these world religions) . . . show certain books, which they call REVELATION or the WORD OF GOD. The Jews say that their Word of God (their Bible, consisting of the books of the Old Testament) was given by God to Moses, face to face; the Christians say that THEIR Word of God (that is, the

> books of the New Testament—but also including the books of the Old Testament) came by Divine Inspiration; the Turks (that is, the Mohammedans) say that their Bible, the KORAN, was brought by an angel. . . . For my own poor part, I disbelieve them all. . . .

Most of the Bibles of the other world religions are more ancient than the Judeo-Christian Bible, and are filled with as many miracle and wonder tales as our own Judeo-Christian Bible. Certain it is that we cannot decline to accept the miraculous stories in these other Bibles, on the basis that they are incredible or improbable, if we continue to insist on pretending that the miracles related in the Bible are genuine and authentic, though they too are equally incredible and improbable.

Our increased knowledge of nature has in any case gradually undermined belief in "supernatural" miracles such as those we find narrated not only in the Christian Bible, but in ALL the Bibles of the world. Such miracles should no longer be considered serious history, because they belong by right to the golden realm of legend and poetry, and should be prized as such.

As respects the several world religions, while we may not altogether agree with the gentleman who declared that "he who knows only one religion, knows none," I am sure that the reader can appreciate the factors which give this declaration broad validity. Similarly, we would hardly be in a position to judge a man's character, if we knew nothing about him but his name, and had no acquaintance with other men against whose relative integrity we could measure his.

It is a misfortune that in America the words "Christianity" and "religion"—and the Bible and Religion—are so intimately associated in the minds of Christians generally, that what may be construed as an "attack" upon even the doctrinal or ritualistic aspects of Christianity, or an "attack" upon the Bible's purportedly divine inspiration, is regarded not as an attack upon Christian doctrine and/or the Bible, but as an assault upon Religion itself, if not an attack upon God. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

Critics of the doctrinal and ritualistic aspects of Christianity and critics of the Bible may be proceeding on motives that are in every way worthy, creditable and sincere. Georgia Harkness, in her book entitled "Toward Understanding the Bible," observes that for one to be a critic of the Bible does not imply anything adverse, derogatory, or opprobrious. She goes on to urge that we should all be willing to abandon our present ideas "if new truth appears."

For one thing, Bible critics may wish to clear God's name, and free it from the imputations of savagery, sadism, duplicity and vindictiveness which the pages of this book, the Bible, plainly set forth that God or Yahweh was guilty of, and which, to their way of thinking, a God of love and understanding could not conceivably be capable of. Or on the other hand, such critics may wish merely to humbly search out the truth about God, and Jesus, and to ascertain the validity of the doctrines of Christianity, so far as it lies within their power to so do.

If our present beliefs about God, Jesus, and Christian doctrinology are wrong or mistaken either in themselves or as they relate to the Bible, should it not be esteemed a highly moral or praiseworthy act to set the record straight? Such Bible critics might realize for instance, that the Christian dogma of Original Sin puts God in a morally degrading light, from the opprobrium of which they may earnestly feel that God should be rescued—and they feel this way because their conception of any possible God is that He would be a God of utmost moral perfection.

In addition, it might be quite impossible for such critics to believe that God—a God of moral justice—could condemn and punish other men for the misdeed of a man (viz., Adam) whom they themselves never saw and whose actions they could not control. By what principle of right should any one of us be condemned for an ancestor's misdeed, even assuming that Adam's aberration was an actual event rather than a myth?

These critics too may well have arrived at the conclusion that the Christian dogma of Original Sin is erroneous, without knowing or before discovering that the story of Eden was founded, as it now appears, on a very ancient myth. Of course, if the story is a myth, as seems likely, the "misdeed" of which it tells is a myth too, and not an historic fact; and if it is a myth, it cannot be the proper subject of divine revelation, nor can it be the basis of a serious religious doctrine. There would be no atonement needed either—for a misdeed that was never in fact perpetrated against God. Nor would there be any semblance of rationality in the notion that God would have cursed all mankind for a FICTIONAL disobedience by a FICTIONAL person.

If there never was a "tree of knowledge"—how strangely the very idea of a TREE of "knowledge" falls on modern ears!—there never was any foundation for the doctrine of Original Sin, and if there was no original sin, there never could have been any genuine basis for the doctrine of Atonement or Redemption, and the doctrine of Incarnation goes by the board too, because the Incarnation is many ways bound up with the supposedly "divine" plan of atonement (a plan which, as we have seen, Jesus was himself completely unaware of, as witness Mark 15: 34).

Sincerely motivated critics of the Bible may further recognize that it impugns the justice of God to accuse Him of favoritism in selecting and showing special or discriminatory favor to a "chosen" people, and to charge Him with partiality for making "revelations" to certain generations of men and then refusing or neglecting to make revelations to other generations.

Such actions on the part of God, if based on fact, would make Him appear lacking in the even-handed justice we conceive as one of His essential attributes, and would therefore reduce His moral stature in our eyes. In short, these critics may want above all to liberate God from such foul imputations, imputations and implications of insidious immoral innuendo that lie festering at the heart of "accepted" Christian doctrines.

Science with a capital "S" has been largely blamed in some quarters for the rejection of the Bible as the Word of God, and Science has likewise often been cast as the Villain and has been indicted as the prime cause for other deviations from what may be termed the "orthodox" Christian view of Jesus, the Trinity, the Bible, etc. But I do not believe that the findings or discoveries of Science are in any way basically to blame for such Christian disaffections or "departures" from so-called orthodoxy. It seems to me that—as indicated above—the dogmas or doctrines THEMSELVES contain the seeds of their own destruction.

It is pathetically absurd to represent God as "favoring" one race or tribe of men more than another. Is God a man that he should play favorites? The suggestion that God could be guilty of partiality imputes this unworthy trait to God and serves only to bring discredit upon God's name. Likewise, the doctrine that divine revelation should have been granted only to some earlier generations of men, and then denied to all future generations, is equally absurd. If this were truly God's modus operandi for communicating His will to men, it seems reasonable to assume that He would have continued His communications in this way down the centuries.

Why should God show favor to one generation of men more than another? As a matter of pure justice, each generation deserves the same consideration. The very suggestion that God would withhold such equal consideration is an affront to God. Why should we who were born after revelation was "sealed," be compelled to take the word of other generations of men who declare that God revealed Himself to them? Can we conscientiously trust their bare word when for example, one disciple of Jesus would not even trust the word of his fellow-disciples?

> John 21: 24-25 But Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus "came" (that is, when Jesus appeared to them after crucifixion). The other disciples therefore said unto Thomas, We have seen the Lord. But Thomas said, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails . . . I WILL NOT BELIEVE. . . .

Again, if this disciple, Thomas, was given definite proof of Jesus' resurrection, why is such proof denied to us? We need this proof far more than he, because at the time Thomas demanded absolute and "tangible" proof as a condition for his belief, he had already witnessed countless miracles done (or purportedly done) at the hand of Jesus. If anyone should be granted the luxury of doubt, it was not he.

Further, if the doctrine that the Bible is God's Word is true, then God (by His own admission) is barbaric and cruel. As we have pointed out in Chapter Four, the Old Testament portrays Him as authorizing and actively abetting the wholesale massacre of men, women and children just because they happened to be guilty of the egregious crime of living peaceably in the hills and valleys of the so-called "promised" land, the land which we are told God had covenanted or bargained to give to the "chosen seed" in return for their loyalty and worship. Even such "bargaining" seems greatly incongruous with the Divine Nature.

In connection with the promised land—if the doctrine of Inspiration were at all valid—God could easily have "inspired" the peaceable inhabitants of this geographical region to migrate elsewhere, and permitted the Israelites to take over without bloodshed, but instead (as we have seen in Chapter Four) God is depicted as actually "hardening" the hearts of the natives so that they would stubbornly refuse to surrender their fertile lands to the Israelite invaders. The natives' steadfast refusal to yield provides God with the opportunity of displaying a complete lack of mercy, by His permitting AND expressly commanding the Israelites to slaughter these peace-loving inhabitants of the promised land, to the last man, woman and child, with the sole exception of the inhabitants of one city, who (the Bible tells us) were spared. The chronicle of this one bloodless exception provides the proof of God's unethical practice IN HIS OWN WORDS—if they are His:

> Joshua 11: 19 There was not a city that made peace with the Israelites except the Hivites . . . of Gibeon: all others they took

> in battle BECAUSE GOD HARDENED THEIR HEARTS . . . that he might destroy them utterly and that they might have no mercy. . . .

This is the morality of a savage, not the morality of a Christian, much less the morality of God Himself.

If we believe in the doctrine—widely held among Christians—that the Bible is God's inspired revelation, or that the Bible infallibly reveals His Word, we believe very poorly of God indeed, because we then confess that we believe that God WAS guilty of the morally degraded actions which the Bible clearly sets forth as the actions of the Deity. Perhaps Francis Bacon had the Bible's portrayal of God in the back of his mind when he wrote the following words in one of his famous "Essays":

> It were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion as is unworthy of Him; for the one is unbelief, the other is contumely (=insult). . . .

This is equivalent to saying that it were far better for a man to be an atheist or an unbeliever, and not believe in God at all, rather than believe that God would be capable of infamous and degrading behavior such as we are plainly told in the pages of the Bible that He was guilty of.

If the Bible is God's Word, as many claim, then what is recorded in this book is in the nature of a confession, by God, of His ignoble, unethical, shameful, and barbaric behavior. Either that, or God is frankly boasting of his sadistic barbarism and His diabolical cunning. Considering this circumstance alone, we would have no choice but to reject the doctrine that the Bible is God's Word.

It is inconceivable—impossible to believe—that God, the Intelligent Power which created this awe-inspiring Cosmos of gyrating suns and whirling galaxies, could either be guilty of or confess to (much less boast of) such morally vile or divinely unbecoming behavior. It is equally inconceivable that God could be capable of the injustice implied in the Christian doctrine of Original Sin which indicts ALL men and ALL women for the acts of their two supposed original ancestors.

Nor can we concede that God could be capable of the favoritism implied in the doctrine of a "chosen" people, or guilty of the partiality involved in the doctrine that revelation was sealed (or ceased) some nineteen centuries ago, forcing all later generations of men to depend for such revelation upon the mere unsupported word of other generations of men, generations too that were conspicuous for their superstitious ignorance and complete unenlightenment and unreliability in other spheres of human learning. Does it seem at all probable that their pronouncements about God in the Bible could be trusted to any greater degree than their pronouncements about early medicine or early astrology?

Of course Francis Bacon does not tie his observations, above cited, to the God of the Bible, but in his defense we must suggest that in his day and age no man in his right mind—or without colossal courage—would openly have aimed a shaft of criticism at the Bible or the God of the Bible. Such criticism, however justified, would in those unenlightened and parlous times have placed the critic's very life in jeopardy.

Yet Francis Bacon no doubt felt that he must needs report the truth as he saw it, but under the circumstances he naturally clothed it in such general language that no one could well find fault with it, and all men (he anticipated) must one day acknowledge the validity of his observations. Perhaps he foresaw an age far removed from his own dark age, when men might investigate the truth about the Bible freely, and be led by their investigations to recognize that to link GOD's name with the Bible, far from doing Him honor, would be an insult or affront to His august name.

In this connection most of us seem to forget or overlook the fact that Jesus himself carefully investigated and pondered the pronouncements recorded in the Bible, and never hesitated to criticize these presumably sacred Scriptures—which even in his day were regarded by his fellow Jews as God's revealed Word—when their content and teachings clashed with his own inner ethical sense of what was right and just. With such a precedent to steady us, why should any man who pretends to be a Christian be squeamish about speaking out boldly if what he sees in the Bible jars discordantly with his God-given ethical sense? To do otherwise, it seems to me, would be the part of a coward, and would forsake the example of Jesus himself.

According to Joshua 10: 8, the battles for the promised land were "rigged" ahead of time and "God"—as we have seen—went out of His way to subtly and insidiously harden the hearts of the brave defenders, so that they would not capitulate or surrender to the hosts of Israel lest, alas, their lives be mercifully spared. Satan, as those who imagine him as Evil Incarnate, could not have conceived a more monstrous or more fiendish plan.

And whenever hereafter you shall hear of the miracle, when it is said that the Sun stood still in the heavens, remember that it is related in the Bible that the Sun stood still—with God's clear consent—to permit the Israelite army to carry through a cruel and bloody massacre, the happy progress of which was threatened by on-coming darkness. Not even this mercy would God grant the peaceable inhabitants of the promised land, that night should fall in its wonted hour! Nay, the hard-pressed defenders must not be saved from the bloodied sword of brutal and murderous execution, nor should some few be permitted to escape, mayhap, under cover of the black and blessed pall of collied night.

Doctrines which by necessary and logical implication declare that God is capable of meanness, cruelty, duplicity, injustice, partiality or the like, MUST BE WRONG—or we are squarely faced with the inference that God is a morally depraved Frankenstein monster, easily capable of the morally degraded and infamous actions, and the petty jealousies and passionate angers which are related of "God" in the Bible. Such a view of God is of course absurd, and the doctrines that suggest such a view, when examined, must fall of their own weight, and be thrown aside as utterly incredible, or chaos is come again.

Before passing on, it might be interesting to scan the thoughts which Thomas Jefferson, that intellectual Colossus of the American Revolutionary era, entertained regarding the passage in Joshua referred to above. He did not reject the miracle on the moral grounds that make it seem so objectionable to us, but suggests its rejection on purely astronomical grounds. It is our extreme good fortune to have a letter written by Jefferson to his nephew, Peter Carr, urging him to read the Bible with every mental faculty alert, and counselling him to test every fact which is alleged in the Bible on the touchstone of reason, and to cautiously measure its probability against known facts and experience:

> For example (Jefferson writes), in the book of Joshua, we are told that the sun stood still several hours. Were we to read that "fact" in Livy or Tacitus (Latin authors) . . . we should put such an allegation in a class with talking (or bleeding) statues, speaking lions, and the like. But it is claimed that the writer of the book of Joshua was "inspired." Examine candidly what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension (of inspiration) is entitled to your inquiry because millions believe it. On the other hand, you are astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of nature that a body revolving on its axis, as the earth does, should have stopped; and should not, by that sudden stoppage, have prostrated animals, trees, and buildings; and should after a certain time have resumed its revolution without a second general prostration. Judge then, is the arrest of the

> earth's motion or the evidence which affirms it, more within the law of probabilities (or more credible) . . . ?

Jefferson might have indicated, among other things, the cataclysmic displacement or sloshing over of the billions of tons of water in the earth's ocean basins, and the consequent flooding of land areas which would have resulted from a sudden stoppage of the earth's rotation. He might also have pointed out the obvious error which makes the purportedly "inspired" author of Joshua say that the "sun" stood still, whereas it is the earth that must have stood still, in order that the sun should "appear" to stand motionless in the heavens (or is it more probable, think you, that God was ignorant of the fact that the earth revolves around the sun, and not vice versa?).

In any case, what Jefferson has to say about this passage in the book of Joshua strongly corroborates our rejection of the authenticity of the event, and calls into serious question the divine inspiration of the event on still other grounds than those we ourselves had suggested.

A great while before I had any inkling that corroborative evidence (such as I have endeavored to marshal in these pages) even existed, I had reached the unshakable conclusion that the widely accepted doctrines relating to the Bible, the doctrines concerning Jesus, and other doctrines of traditional Christian theology were mistaken or untenable. At the start, my firm conviction regarding the total inacceptability of these doctrines was based entirely on MORAL and PSYCHOLOGICAL grounds, because at that time I had not sought, nor thought to seek confirming evidence such as the Bible itself might—and indeed does—provide.

Nor had I had the opportunity then to examine and evaluate the end-results of the many millions of hours given to all phases of Biblical research by dedicated students of every shade of orthodox and unorthodox conviction. To these thousands of nameless Bible scholars my debt is indeed great. So great in fact is my indebtedness to these scholars that I am reminded of a fable that I recall reading in my grammar school days. This fable will best serve to place my debt in a proper perspective.

A contest, according to the fable, was to be held amongst all the winged creatures of the air, to determine which could fly closest to heaven. All the various species of birds took part, and the weaker-winged finches and song-birds fell out of the race at an early stage, leaving only the sturdy-winged hawk, falcon, condor and eagle. These continued to wing their way skyward until the hawk, falcon, and condor, as I remember the story, had to drop out of the race.

The eagle alone continued to mount upwards, climbing into the sky until, spent with its mighty effort, or finding the air too rare to support its giant wings, it too had to give over the attempt to fly any higher. But the eagle did not carry off the palm, because unbeknownst to all, a tiny wren had stowed away upon the eagle's back all the way up, and when the eagle could fly no higher, the wren had but to spread its puny wings to attain a higher altitude. I am somewhat like the wren in the story, but unlike the wren, I am indebted not to the labors of just one, but to the labors of many.

Having reached the conscientious conviction that the doctrines long held by Christian theologians regarding the Bible and Jesus were erroneous, I of course realized that it would be a Herculean task, if not a virtual impossibility, to effectively advance my opinion to others if I were to cite only moral and psychological reasons for my beliefs. Sustained by the belief that where an apparently insurmountable problem exists, its solution cannot be attained unless there are those who have faith that its solution is possible, I proceeded to set about to uncover—if it were at all possible—more objective evidence (such as the disciple Thomas demanded before he would believe)—evidence of a kind that might tend to confirm my own conclusions, and yet be of sufficient weight, tangibility, and substance to have at least some intrinsic persuasive power, when I should offer it to others for their consideration.

For one thing, I reflected that surely some others before me must have harbored much the same convictions as I did about these strange and basically immoral Christian doctrines. My ethical sensitivity was certainly not superior to that of countless millions of souls who had walked along the gloriously sun-lit path of our mortal predicament, in the inexorable unfolding of time, before I was set upon the way myself.

Looking about, I soon found that there were many indeed who had looked askance and with uncertain suspicion, and with an uneasy perturbation, at the claims made on behalf of the Bible and Jesus by ancient Christian theologians. Even among devout Christians of the past and among sincere living Christians of today I found many who were plagued or tortured by honest doubts. Many honest souls (I discovered further) had turned to atheism apparently to escape what they considered either the absurdity, the rank hypocrisy, or—if they sensed it—the immorality of Christian doctrinology and ritual. If THIS was religion, they would have none of it. This should not be taken to mean that these disturbed souls also rejected so-called "Christian" ethics along with Christianity's dubious doctrines.

Many there were too who clung to the doctrines of the past, feeling themselves justified in so doing, for the sake of preserving Christian ethics, not realizing that there was no logical or necessary connection between Christian doctrines and Christian ethics. Christian doctrines and Christian ethics grow on separate trees, from separate roots. But those who clung to the doctrines, though they apprehended their strangeness and illogic, did so, I feel assured, because they reasoned that the very ethics of Christianity might be discredited if the doctrines were determined to be erroneous or false.

In addition, I found that even the great poets of our race, whom I might call "latter-day prophets," sometimes reflected a gnawing doubt regarding the "justness" of the Christian scheme and dispensation. For example, in my undergraduate days at Washington Square, when I read "Paradise Lost," I remember wondering at Milton's choice of words in the passage in which he tells of his purpose in undertaking the composition of this great epic poem. In these lines Milton is invoking God's aid and inspiration so that he, the poet, might more adequately achieve his purpose:

> And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
> Before all temples, the upright heart and pure,
> Instruct me. . . . What in me is dark,
> Illumine; what is low, raise and support;
> That to the height of this great argument (=theme)
> I may assert Eternal Providence
> And JUSTIFY the ways of God to men. . . .
>
> —*Paradise Lost, Book I, lines* 17-25

Why, I had asked myself, why should it be necessary to "justify" the ways of God to man? If this was Milton's declared purpose in undertaking this great epic work, he must have reasoned that the "ways of God" REQUIRED justification or defense.

Inasmuch as a course of justification always implies some possible doubt or suspicion of the justice or justness of whatever is sought to be "justified," a genuine need must have been felt by Milton that God's action (that is, His behavior according to the Christian doctrinological system) must needs be defended or explained, to demonstrate—to those who might wonder about its complete justness—that it was in fact altogether just, even though at first blush it might appear questionable, illogical or unethical.

Actually, Milton does NOT succeed in justifying God's behavior toward mankind, simply because it is impossible to adequately justify ANY scheme of salvation based on the Biblical story contained in Genesis. It is impossible to make such a scheme appear consistent with the high level of morality we must in all due reverence attribute or associate with God. A "Moral" God simply could not conceivably—in all fairness—condemn the rest of mankind for an act of which they themselves were individually guiltless.

Furthermore, God could not justifiably blame a man (or a woman either) for succumbing to the persuasive wiles of one of His own superior creatures, for Satan (we are told) WAS an Angel, though fallen. God certainly could not condemn mankind—it must be admitted on all sides—especially when it was within His power (being, as we are given to understand, omnipotent) to prevent Satan's evil activity, either by confining him to the Hell we are told is his proper domain, or by utterly destroying him, or keeping him under adequate restraint in some other fashion.

The fact that Eve was apparently not at all surprised or put on her guard when a snake started to talk and to display the power of coherence in speech, and the faculties of reason and persuasion, tempts us to ask what kind of inferior brain did God give Eve? I should think that Christian women the world over would furiously decry such a slander upon God or such a libel upon their sex. Certainly, Christian women everywhere should take exception to Paul's dictum in the first epistle to the Corinthians, and should seriously challenge its Divine inspiration:

> 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 Let women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak . . . for it is SHAME for women to speak in Church. . . .

Is this the Word of God, which requires women to maintain a stony silence in churches? How many Christian women obey this "divinely" inspired injunction? If Christian women truly believe that the Bible is God's Word, why do they so lightly disregard His precept here revealed by way of Paul?

Are we children that we should accept such an utterly incredible tale (viz., the story of Eve's seduction by the snake) as true, and that we should consider such a tale as trustworthy—worthy not only of our full belief, but be willing to go so far as to regard it as so thoroughly credible as to make it the very cornerstone of the salvation which Christian theology promises? Nay, should we esteem it so worthy of our "trust" that we should attempt—with all our power and strength—to defend or "justify" the validity of such an absurd tale, to make it palatable to reason?

A poet of comparatively modern times, A. E. Housman, in his delightful collection of Shropshire poems, chuckles merrily at Milton's failure to justify God's behavior:

Malt does more than Milton can,
To justify God's ways to man. . . .

I have often wondered whether the fact that Satan often seems to emerge in most readers' minds as the real hero of "Paradise Lost" may not be due to the impossibility to make the Bible story entirely credible?

Be that as it may, Milton, to be consistent AND because, like all men of deep moral inclinations, he struggles to be honest, concedes that without God's permission Satan could NOT have brought his evil talents to bear on frail humankind. Milton has just narrated in his story how Satan (called the "Shining One" or Lucifer in Heaven before his fall), together with the rebel angels leagued with him in his conspiracy against God, had just been hurled headlong from the battlements of Heaven, into the loathsome pit of Hell. Satan and his cohorts are described as helplessly chained to the lake of fire:

So stretched out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay,
Chain'd to the burning lake; NOR EVER THENCE
HAD RISEN OR HEAVED HIS HEAD, BUT THAT THE WILL
AND HIGH PERMISSION OF ALL-RULING HEAVEN
LEFT HIM AT LARGE TO HIS OWN DARK DESIGNS. . . .

Milton is reduced to this sorry expedient, to account for Satan's presence in the garden of Eden: it was—we are told—by the "HIGH" permission of God. Milton too is faced in his mind with the premises of dogmatic Christian theology and wonders about the evil let loose in the world, and is forced to conclude that God Himself must have been some way responsible.

Naturally Milton wants to defend God's behavior and honor in the matter, and we can begin to understand why, in choosing his words to explain the motive or reason for his undertaking the composition of "Paradise Lost," he candidly declares his purpose is to "justify" God's ways to man because, belike, he sincerely thinks that God's behavior towards man calls for justification or defense.

Another English poet of renown, Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his little-known "Essay on Christianity" exclaims:

> How monstrous a calumny have not IMPOSTORS (i.e., the gospellists) dared to advance against Jesus. . . . They (the gospellists)

> have represented Jesus as asserting that God . . . has devised a scheme whereby the body shall live after its apparent dissolution AND BE RENDERED CAPABLE OF EVERLASTING TORTURE. . . .

Does it seem at all possible to the reader that a God of love and mercy would leave us, after death, with our "spirit" and strength entire, the more strongly to suffer and support our pains?

Shelley no doubt felt himself amply justified in calling the writers of the gospels "impostors," reflecting that one who taught the thoroughly beneficent ethic, namely "Love your enemy, bless them who curse you" could not conceivably—without doing violence to logic—have asserted his belief in a God who planned ENDLESSLY protracted tortures for those who were not marked for salvation, whether by arbitrary election or by individual merit. Mark clearly reports that Jesus warns that many (a great number you may be sure) shall indeed be:

> . . . cast into hell, into the fire that NEVER shall be quenched. . . . (Mark 9: 45)

The threat of never-ending torture in hell-fire is repeated SIX times in as many verses (see verses 43 to 48, inclusive, in the 9th Chapter of Mark), so there can be no mistake about Jesus' expressed and reiterated belief in eternal punishment—if Mark's report is to be trusted, or credited as God's inspired Word. This belief on the part of Jesus is indeed confirmed in many other passages in the New Testament (for example, Jesus speaks again of "ETERNAL" damnation in Mark 3: 29).

As a matter of fact, such passages are sufficiently numerous in the New Testament that it is altogether reasonable for us to assume—if the gospel records are to be trusted at all, or even to a minimal degree—that Jesus actually DID believe and teach the doctrine of endless torture, a doctrine incidentally which was identical with that held and taught by the members of the Dead Sea scrolls Sect.

Complete destruction or annihilation would be merciful compared to the truly diabolical scheme of preserving human beings "alive" after death for the express purpose of having them undergo deliciously excruciating physical torments in eternally unquenchable fires. Impostors the gospel writers may have been in respect to some of their reports, but this incredible thing that the poet Shelley could not bring himself to believe about Jesus may ironically have been one of the relatively few reports that the gospellists had transmitted accurately, and they would therefore not have been guilty of imposture in representing Jesus as believing in eternal punishment.

There can be no doubt—if the gospel report is authentic—that Jesus' belief in infinite forgiveness ("seventy times seven") was radically inconsistent with his belief in the unforgiving principle involved in never-ending torment for the wicked, or for that matter for those who were not arbitrarily chosen to be saved (whether wicked or not)—if the immoral doctrine of "election" seemingly taught by Jesus is presumed to obtain. The two beliefs simply cannot be reconciled one with the other. They are at opposite poles. The idea of infinite forgiveness is a noble, or one might say a sublime ethic, but the notion of everlasting torture is immoral and Satanic, and twenty ways unworthy of God conceived as a God of Infinite Mercy and Love.

Shelley's intuition at least was correct. He detected an aura of imposture or fraud in the gospels. He sensed an incredible incongruity in their reports, and he could not bring himself to associate Jesus' name or nature (as it filtered through to him) with the ruthless savagery and vicious sadism implied in the doctrine of everlasting torture the gospellists insisted Jesus had taught. This unholy doctrine, Shelley saw, was morally irreconcilable with the doctrine of infinite forgiveness. It was absurd—Shelley must have reasoned—to believe that Jesus could have taught two such opposite or contrary doctrines. He therefore concluded that the gospellists were guilty of imposture (and guilty of slandering Jesus) when they said that Jesus asserted that God had indeed prepared a place of pitilessly endless torments.

But the truth seems to be that Jesus did in fact believe in and teach both infinite forgiveness and infinite unforgiveness. We cannot escape this conclusion if the gospels are to be trusted. However, HUMAN beings sometimes harbor and teach beliefs that are inconsistent or incongruous. As a matter of fact, only God or the Divine Nature would be incapable of such inconsistency or incongruity. This again could be used to demonstrate that Jesus was neither himself divine, nor did he partake of divine wisdom. Jesus apparently could not see the basic conflict between the two doctrines, so vividly transparent to Shelley.

Like many another, the poet Shelley had an uncomfortable or uneasy feeling when he read through and mused upon the gospels. He could sense that something was imperfect or awry in the pattern they presented. There were elements of conflict and contradiction, elusive elements of disharmony and discord that nagged at his sensitive ear. Shelley's ethical sense was too keenly developed to be altogether deceived, and the dissonant chords he detected in the gospel accounts no doubt gave him a feeling of aesthetic malaise.

Anything lacking ethical symmetry has an ugly feature about it which sometimes evades easy detection, and almost always defies accurate description; nevertheless, by virtue of the divine touch-stone implanted within us all, we have a distinct sensitivity to it. In poets this sensitivity is usually more highly developed than it is in more prosaic folk like you and I. Perhaps this higher ethical sensitivity accounts for their being poets in the first place. Just such a sensitivity may have prompted the poet Tennyson to write the following lines:

> There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> BELIEVE ME, than in half the creeds. . . .

He too sensed a "wrongness" or dis-symmetry in the dogmatic creeds. He doubtless realized too that genuine faith need not be tied to such creeds, or was more vital when liberated from the confining effects of such creeds.

But now to return to our Shakespearean quotation ("there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so"), there is little need to say that this line has been frequently interpreted to mean that there is nothing "morally" good or "morally" bad but thinking makes it so, whereas it is extremely unlikely that it was intended to be thus construed. In any case, such an interpretation, in my opinion, would be inaccurate. Just "thinking" that an action is right (or wrong) does NOT make it so.

This is not to say that there might not be many instances where one person might consider a given act noble, and yet another person would regard the same act as tainted, at least to some extent, with evil or meanness; but such differences of opinion would not arise just from the process of thinking itself, or arbitrarily, but would depend on the varying weight such persons would give to circumstances attending the action being judged.

There is only one strained sense in which the saying might be altogether true as regards what is morally good or morally bad, and that is that if no conscious mind existed to reflect on and weigh the circumstances, no moral judgments of right and wrong could be made; but for purposes of our discussion, we assume the continued existence of such conscious minds.

I think we might fairly re-state the quotation by saying that there is nothing morally good or morally bad but CIRCUMSTANCES make it so. In this re-statement we find the opportunity to illustrate an ethical truth which I believe will be far more helpful to us in our search for religious truth than the profound psychological truth intended and expressed by Hamlet.

The validity of the re-statement, that it is IN THE SURROUNDING CIRCUMSTANCES that we must discover whether an action is morally good or bad, is confirmed in our experience and in our daily conversation, when we weigh the acts of our fellow-men (or our own actions) for condemnation or for praise. We say for example that whereas we might extol or censure another's action, or our own, under ordinary circumstances, we feel obliged to withhold our praise or blame because of what might be called "extraordinary" circumstances. There is no axiom truer than Payn's, that "circumstances alter cases."

When asked what we would do, if faced with a difficult choice of action, we frequently reply that our decision would largely depend on the circumstances. The decision to drop the first A-bomb on the homeland of Japan must have involved a great deal of soul-searching on the part of the then President and his War Staff. Was the act morally justifiable or was it an act without any possible moral justification in the eyes of God?

To kill needlessly seems wrong and to kill innocent civilians in such numbers and in so horrendous a fashion seems somehow INTRINSICALLY wrong or evil. But considering other circumstances, the President and his Staff must have felt that their action, if not an objectively "good" one, was at least morally justifiable. No doubt they judged that dropping this frightful bomb would materially shorten the war and thus save some considerable fraction of a million American soldiers from death and maiming.

Would you have authorized the drop? Or having authorized it, would you be able to square it with your conscience as morally justifiable? One thing is certain: before we can judge the moral quality of any act whatever, we must if possible consider ALL the relevant circumstances. ALL factors have to be weighed in the scale. No one is justified in just "thinking" it was wrong to drop the bomb without carefully weighing every related circumstance and every pertinent consideration.

Now let us, if we may, apply these thoughts to the Ten Commandments. One of these Commandments is THOU SHALT NOT KILL. Yet under certain circumstances it is almost universally conceded that killing is justified or morally right. We would not hesitate, I feel certain, to kill a man who had gone beserk and whom we could not otherwise restrain, who was running amuck with a lethal weapon and who was indiscriminately killing men, women and children. We would not hesitate to kill, even though the man could not be considered responsible or accountable for his acts because of an erratic mental condition, of which we were aware.

Again, we daily execute men who have been convicted of premeditated "first degree" murder, exacting a life for a life. On the other hand we provide a lesser punishment for those adjudged guilty of killing in "hot blood," varying the punishment to fit the circumstances of a crime. We thus clearly recognize the importance of CIRCUMSTANCES in our judgment of the degree of any wrongdoer's guilt.

But God's Commandment—IF it is indeed His Commandment—is clear and specific: THOU SHALT NOT KILL. The Commandment does not say "except under extenuating circumstances," nor does it say that we may kill animals for example, if needful to provision our larders. Can you conceive that God, looking before and after, could have made His Commandment so starkly specific as to shut out possible just or practical exceptions? We have of course no right to "read in" exceptions, nor do we have any right to modify His Commandment, if it is His.

The very fact that the Commandment makes no allowance for "circumstances" seems to fairly establish its HUMAN origin. However some reader might at this juncture point out that perhaps after all the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill" was INTENDED to be construed or translated to apply only to out-and-out cold-blooded "murder," and not to killing that was needful or which circumstances might excuse. To such a reader, I can only reply that Moses did not construe it as so limited—and who, prithee, would know better than Moses how the Commandment should be interpreted and acted upon? For do we not have it on the best authority (e.g., the Bible) that Moses received the Commandment IN PERSON from God Himself and spent forty days and forty nights in secret communication with God?

We have already seen, in Chapter Four, how Moses disregarded this supposedly "divine" commandment at every turn, and—Eichmann-like—wantonly slaughtered thousands of women and children, including pregnant women and helpless infants. These killings were in cold blood and without extenuating need. Moreover we cannot escape the fact that the Bible itself informs us that these killings, these murders, were carried out BY GOD'S EXPRESS COMMAND.

Alas, it appears for one thing that, according to Moses' interpretation, God's prohibition against killing (or murder) certainly did NOT apply to any person or nation outside the tribe of Israel. Moses (we are told) was commanded by God to kill such outsiders or Gentiles who stood in the way of his conquest of the promised land. Is it conceivable that God would issue a commandment against murder, and then turn around and issue a contrary command to wantonly murder? Such behavior and such inconsistency hardly befits our conception of a moral God.

Is it also credible that Moses would have deliberately refused to honor the commandment not to kill (or "murder," if this be the correct rendition), if he had in fact obtained the commandment from the very hand of God? We are told that Moses stood so in fear of Yahweh or was so profoundly over-awed by His Presence that he took off his shoes as he approached Him. Does it seem credible then that he would dare violate the least commandment of the God whom he so feared or so held in awe?

I think that, all things considered, we must conclude that the commandment was not of divine, but rather of human origin. It was another of those moral "laws" which man is ever making—and breaking, when it is convenient for him to do so, or when he is convinced he can do so without being taxed with the consequences of such violation or breach.

Before we leave the subject of the Commandments, the reader might be interested, if not surprised—or perchance dumbfounded—to learn that there are actually TWO different versions of the so-called Ten Commandments, both duly recorded in God's Word. This may perhaps recall to the minds of some readers the two different versions of the Creation and the two different versions of the Flood contained in the Bible—already discussed and examined elsewhere in this book.

The familiar version of the Ten Commandments appears in Exodus 20: 3-17, also in Deuteronomy 5: 6-21. The other, UNFAMILIAR and unpublicized version appears in Exodus 34: 14-26 and does not include the commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill." In the "unfamiliar" version, these are the Ten Commandments:

(1) Thou shalt worship no other God; for the Lord . . . is a jealous God . . .
(2) Thou shalt make thee no molten gods . . .
(3) The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep . . .
(4) Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh thou shalt rest . . .
(5) Thou shalt observe the feast of weeks . . .
(6) Thrice in the year shall all your men-children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel . . .

(7) Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven . . .
(8) Neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the passover be left unto the morning . . .
(9) The firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the Lord . . .
(10) Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk . . .

This unfamiliar Decalogue should command the same respect which the familiar Decalogue is given, for it has the same authority, the same claim to our belief. Its genuineness is authoritatively authenticated:

> Exodus 34: 27-28 And the Lord said unto Moses, WRITE THOU THESE WORDS. . . . And Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. . . And he wrote upon the tables of stone . . . the Ten Commandments. . . .

What are we to believe? Were THESE then the "authentic" Ten Commandments purportedly given by God to Moses, and were the other ten commandments (with which we are all familiar) merely invented by a later generation? To support the latter suggested conclusion, it may be here stated that Bible scholars readily admit that as between the two sets of Ten Commandments, the unfamiliar set is of more ancient composition, and therefore it would seem more likely to have been the more authentic one of the two, if either can be called God's authentic Law.

The unfamiliar Ten Commandments have another claim to authenticity which the familiar Decalogue lacks. The Bible tells us that the Commandments were part of a "covenant" or agreement between God and the Israelites:

> Exodus 34: 28 And he wrote upon the tables of stone the WORDS OF THE COVENANT, the Ten Commandments. . . .

Let it be particularly noted that the ten commandments in the 34th Chapter of Exodus deal with duties and dues that shall be paid by the Israelites to their Lord God in return for the promised land:

> Exodus 34: 10-11 God said, Behold, I make a covenant . . . OBSERVE THOU that which I COMMAND thee this day. . . .

The Israelites are to "observe" His Commandments, and in return God covenants to deliver unto them the promised land:

> Exodus 34: 11 Behold, I (God) shall drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. . . .

God does not command them NOT to kill. Rather He commands them to invade AND KILL.

In the verses that follow the verses cited above, God informs the Israelites how He shall be worshipped, and what sacrifices shall be made unto Him, and the acceptable mode thereof; also what "dues" shall be paid Him, e.g., the firstfruits of the harvest and the firstborn of their cattle, oxen or sheep. Taken all together, these are the legal "considerations" of the covenant or contract—this is what God expected in return for His pledge to deliver to the Israelites a certain tract of land, thereinafter referred to as the "promised" land, because it was pledged or promised to them by God in this very covenant.

The familiar Ten Commandments on the other hand are more in the nature of a social code and would not be as likely to be part of a covenant between God and the Israelites. A covenant would more probably catalog or articulate what the Party of the First Part, God, shall receive in return for His help in driving out the soon-to-be dispossessed inhabitants of the promised land, rather than to command how the Party of the Second Part, to wit the Israelites, shall behave toward their fellow Israelites and/or other human beings.

We may note in passing that in both versions of the Ten Commandments, we are given to understand—ostensibly by God Himself—that He is a "jealous" God. In the familiar version, it is clearly written:

> Exodus 20: 4-5 Thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . .
> For I the Lord thy God am a JEALOUS God. . . .

The same thing is repeated in the unfamiliar, less publicized version of the Ten Commandments, which we have already quoted in full in the preceding paragraphs. In other words, God is pictured in both versions as admitting (or boasting) that He is guilty of or subject to a passion which even we humans deprecate or condemn as unworthy in ourselves. How much more must we think such a jealous trait unworthy of God! Such a petty passion is frankly inconceivable in the Divine Nature. It seems that, turn where we will in the Bible, the Bible again and again ITSELF denies the doctrine of Divine authorship, unless (as for example here) we are willing to concede that God's moral nature is more degraded or less sensitive than our own.

It seems evident that the commandments were intended solely for the Israelites and not as a universal code for ALL peoples, such as God would certainly have prepared had He had a hand in it. For, even assuming for the moment that the Commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill" was God-given AND one of the "authentic" ten (and believe me, this is a lot to grant in one swallow), nevertheless the Israelites and their leaders, including Moses himself, always appeared to act as though this Commandment did NOT apply to those outside Israel.

In any case, the indisputable fact is that the Israelites proceeded to slay, kill and massacre (and steal from) hundreds of thousands of peaceable men, women, and children of OTHER "Gentile" tribes and nations in pursuit of their bloody conquest of the promised land, aided and encouraged by God, or so the Bible—or if you will, God Himself—informs us.

It is hardly within the realm of probability that what the Bible records of God's help and abettal in this matter is even marginally true, and if the Bible maligns God so evilly, there is no escaping the fact that it is NOT His Word, but the mistaken chronicle of men who—to salve their consciences—blamed their Nazi-like sadism and savagery on Divine commands, much as in ages past men attributed their lascivious or drunken proclivities and their boorish and unsocial dispositions, and their gloomy or saturnine temperaments on their borning stars. Few of us are sufficiently clear-witted, or have courage enough to put the blame for our personal shortcomings squarely where it usually belongs:

> The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our "stars" (that is to say, lies not in our horoscopes), but in ourselves. . . .
>
> —"*Julius Caesar,*" *Shakespeare.*

> We (blame) our "stars," as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, or drunkards by an enforced obedience to planetary influence . . . and (ascribe) all that WE are evil in, to a DIVINE thrusting on. . . .
>
> —"*King Lear,*" *Shakespeare.*

Moses too apparently pretended to himself and to others that the evil things he did, he did not of his own volition, but by Divine command, Divine inspiration, or by a Divine "thrusting on."

Not only does it appear that the prohibition against killing had application or prevailed only as between Israelite and Israelite, but other institutions like slavery were—according to God's Word—in like manner only prohibited among the tribes of Israel, but could be practiced freely and with God's plenary blessing upon members of any heathen or Gentile nation outside the pale of Israel:

> Leviticus 25: 4-46 Of the heathen that are round about you . . . shall ye buy bondsmen and bondsmaids . . . and they shall be your bondsmen FOREVER. . . .

In short, God—if it is God who is speaking—clearly sanctions slavery and alas, God plainly lets it be known in this passage too, that only the "heathen" (a term which includes you and I and all peoples other than those of the Jewish race) are proper grist for the slave mill—only Gentiles, God tells us, are fit to serve as slaves.

We may note besides that "God" (according to the Bible) declares that boughten slaves shall properly remain slaves "forever," so that it most evidently appears that God doth here put His stamp of approval and His Great Seal upon slavery as a perpetual institution, an institution which we of mere mortal breed are apparently wrong to regard as morally unjustifiable.

Can we truly accept this pronouncement as God's authentic Word? Would it not show more reverence toward the Deity, and evince a greater faith on our part in God's goodness and high morality if we declare that it was NOT God, but men who made this pronouncement—this immoral edict—and men who wrote the Bible? It is impossible to believe that God would sanction so evil, so immoral, and so unjust an institution as slavery, and manifest the unfair discrimination as between one racial group of men (the children of Israel) and all others, prescribing that only the latter shall be held in bondage. We would turn from such a God in disgust and loathing, as undeserving of our respect or love.

As previously indicated, besides the "unfamiliar" Ten Commandments, there are two places in the Bible where the familiar Ten Commandments are recorded, namely Exodus 20: 3-17 and Deuteronomy 5: 6-21. But even in these two versions of the "familiar" Commandments we find discrepancies; for example, each version explains the origin of the Sabbath day in a different way.

Viewing these discrepancies, we are faced again with two equally unsatisfactory alternatives, for either (1) God was ignorant of or confused as to the reason the Sabbath was established; or (2) those whom He inspired were in error. The first alternative is unthinkable, and the second confirms—again—that those He inspired (if the doctrine of Inspiration is tenable) could not be depended upon to accurately report His revelation and therefore the Bible would be untrustworthy as a guide to "divine" truth.

In one version of the familiar Decalogue we are told that the Sabbath day is set apart because God rested on the seventh day, after He had spent six days creating heaven and earth:

> Exodus 20: 8-11 Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is . . . and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. . . .

In the other account of the familiar Ten Commandments, we are told that the reason for observing the Sabbath consists in the fact that the Lord led the Israelites out of Egypt, and the Sabbath day is set apart to remind them of their deliverance from this bondage:

> Deuteronomy 5: 12-15 Keep the sabbath day . . . as the Lord thy God commanded . . . remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt and that God brought thee out thence. . . . THEREFORE the Lord commanded thee to keep the sabbath. . . .

It seems obvious that such contradiction, discrepancy, and confusion simply could not be conceived as POSSIBLE in a book of which God was the author, or in a book written by men taught by His competent inspiration. Being able to fathom all things, God would be able too to fathom the intricacies of language and semantics and would have expressed what He had to say with such crystal clarity that there would be no possibility for anyone to mistake His meaning.

Yet we behold, as we look down the dark corridor of the past and turn to gaze into the bright sunlight of today the spectacle of hundreds of Christian sects each working out a different interpretation of "His" words, and each insisting—and each with some appearance or degree of plausibility—that ITS interpretation is reasonable and accurate.

Why is this? Is it not because the language of the Bible is so confused and so contradictory that the words lend themselves to varying (and sometimes opposite) interpretations? Not they, but God surely is at fault if He wrote so poorly or so vaguely that those who read His words are confused as to His meaning. To blame human agents, who might ostensibly have written under His inspiration, for the vagueness and contradiction found in the Bible's pages, would imply that God's inspiration or instruction was incompetent, or that the "truths" revealed were so ambiguously and so unclearly expressed to them by God that they were incapable of comprehending them.

That God could be guilty of such incompetence or large ambiguity, I cannot believe, and the same conclusion that has been haunting us right along, is forced upon us again, viz., that God—the GOD of Nature who created our world, the GOD who governs the cosmic creative process—did not in fact either write or supernaturally inspire the writing of this book, known as the Bible.

If I am correct in saying that right and wrong in the moral sphere are always an integral PART OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES, then any rule, principle, law, or commandment laid down for the guidance of our behavior must take circumstances into due consideration or either fail or be inadequate to the purpose. God, being God, would certainly be more aware than we that moral wrong cannot exist in a vacuum, dissociated from relevant circumstances, and He would not issue a blanket Commandment which completely disregards the very circumstances that give an act its essential moral character.

This disregard of circumstances must make us also look with suspicion upon such a blanket interdiction for example as that directed against social dancing by some church groups. We simply cannot label some act—any act—as "sinful" or morally wrong IN AND OF ITSELF. Surely, under some circumstances, dancing—like "killing"—may be quite proper, and in still other circumstances dancing may actually serve as a morally beneficial outlet.

The blanket Commandment THOU SHALT NOT KILL is manifestly not applicable to men at war, who are obliged to defend themselves against armed aggression which seeks their destruction. It would be all kinds of folly not to resist such aggression and not to kill those who seek to kill us. Jesus' ethic which tells us that we should NOT resist evil (and aggression is an evil by any standard) is likewise inapplicable. Evil must be resisted wherever it rears its ugly and hydra head, and opposed indeed to the full extent of our capacity to cope with it. Actually the advice given by Jesus in this respect may have been intended for helpless people living in subjection to a foreign power, and in any case as a universal rule of action would be very much and very seriously mistaken and could not be followed by anyone who expected the world to go on and on for an indefinite period.

On the other hand, for someone who believed, like Jesus, that the world was going to end anyway, and quickly—in fact in his own generation—perhaps this counsel had some merit, inasmuch as the "evil" would be automatically or shortly eliminated anyhow with the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. But since the world did NOT end and whereas evil is a long-lived and many-hydra'd thing, we had best shout down Jesus' teaching in this respect and endeavor to eliminate evil, or at least keep it under some measure of control so that life may be livable for ourselves and for future generations of men.

Earlier in this chapter I intimated that before I had become aware of the many and varied evidences set forth in the foregoing chapters, which give corroborative substantiation and support to my conviction that the doctrines of traditional or evangelical Christian theology are founded in error or myth, I had already reached the firm belief that these doctrines should be rejected as erroneous (that is, contrary to truth), basing my conclusions at that time primarily or almost entirely on MORAL and PSYCHOLOGICAL grounds.

We have so far suggested in this chapter some of the unfortunate moral implications inherent in the traditional doctrines of Christianity, implications which militate against our ethical sense, and implications which make these doctrines appear absurd and incredible because they portray God in a morally degrading light, if not as a positive goggle-eyed moral monster or prodigy of Evil.

I should like now to briefly illustrate how these long-held doctrines of Christian theology, which are in so many ways impossible to accept on MORAL grounds, are in addition impossible to accept on PSYCHOLOGICAL grounds.

All of us who are exposed in youth to what may be termed Christian indoctrination, are impressed again and again with what is called the Passion of Jesus. The word "passion" in this sense is an obsolete word that denotes "suffering." It is dinned in our ears that Jesus "suffered" for us. We are told over and over that Jesus suffered to save us. We are reminded endlessly that Jesus suffered to atone for "OUR" sins (or suffered to atone for the sin which, according to the immoral doctrine of Original Sin, we purportedly inherited from Adam, though we were in no way involved in his transgression against God).

We are taught further that there was great virtue or infinite efficacy in Jesus' Passion (or suffering) which alone would serve to vicariously redeem us from the consequences deriving from the purported "fact" (or doctrine) that we are born "in sin." His Passion (=Suffering) was the valid ransom money acceptable to God, wherewith salvation might be dearly purchased for all men.

When I stopped to reflect upon the matter, as I grew to young manhood, I came to the conclusion that it would have been psychologically impossible for Jesus—if he were God, or a Divine Incarnation, or the Son of God endued with Divine Wisdom—it was impossible, I repeat, for Jesus to have "suffered" at all. From introspective self-analysis, it becomes clear to us that the only truly unbearable suffering or distress that it is possible for us to undergo, arises from mental anguish, and the degree of our anguish and suffering depends upon the measure of our UNCERTAINTY as to how things stand or how things will turn out.

Even if we undergo intense and harrowing physical pain, such purely physical pain is not "suffering" in any real sense when we KNOW FOR CERTAIN for example, how long the pain has to be borne, or if we KNOW FOR CERTAIN that the ultimate outcome will be a complete cessation of pain, coupled with a return to mental serenity or comfort. What I am trying to say is that any physical pain or mental distress can be endured BY ANYONE without actual "suffering," if that person is CERTAIN that all will eventually be well.

The only hell on earth, I submit, is uncertainty. As we mature, we learn to live with and adjust ourselves to Uncertainty, and the degree of our success in this regard (as has been suggested by someone whose name escapes me), is often the measure of our maturity. Even when our faith is at its fullest development, it is still but FAITH, and it is not categorical certainty that sustains us.

By reason of faith, we may indeed FEEL certain that what we believe is so, just as we may enthusiastically believe that our conscious personalities shall mature or translate into some state after the event of our physical death. But of this immortal sequel to life we have no absolutely SURE KNOWLEDGE. Therefore, at odd moments, when our reflections run darkly, our mental anguish may become excruciatingly severe when we contemplate the possibility that perhaps we—who believe in God's goodness, and have faith in our survival beyond death—may be wrong.

So devastating sometimes is the thought of personal annihilation that we must needs shut it out or screen it from view with a more determined faith, dyking ourselves from the bleak tides of cheerless pessimism and doubt. This is not to suggest that we must regard religious faith as an "escape mechanism." It is far more and far other than that. Faith is a rewarding way of life which, as a matter of empirical (=observable) fact, brings the greatest serenity and the highest sense of personal dignity.

Faith is a way of life we might still choose even though we were certain that death was a dead end—a blind and eyeless corner—as indeed many amongst us are honestly convinced it is. For example, we might still have faith, if not in the survival of our personalities, at least in the validity of ethical values, which some regard as in the nature of mirage and born of wishful thinking. We might still pursue what seems (to those who have this faith) the "nobler" course in the way we conduct our lives even though we might feel certain that our life and our personality end simultaneously and altogether at death.

It seems difficult to believe that any of us shall be (as they say) "judged" hereafter for our acts in this world, or that we shall be either rewarded or punished in any after-state as a result of such judgment. However I personally believe that each wrong or ignoble act of which we may be guilty carries its own immediate and—in a sense—its own eternal penalties.

It carries an immediate penalty by depriving us for example of the exquisite joy we might have had or presently experienced had we attuned our action more closely to what we conceive as the ethical law of God, or it may punish us by bringing us harrowing sorrow or remorse. And it may carry an eternal penalty by burdening us, literally forever, with the "memory" of having lost one irrecoverable opportunity to attain the ecstatic joy we might have known or one opportunity to avoid the gnawing remorse we must ever feel when we think back upon it, time without end:

> He who does a good deed is instantly ennobled; he who does a mean deed is by the action itself contracted (i.e., reduced in stature). . . . When a man chooses . . . the good and great deed . . . then deep melodies wander through his soul. . . .
> —*Emerson, Divinity School Address* (1838).

How very intense can be our joy over a good or noble action is illustrated in an experience we have all shared time and again, when we have been fortunate enough to contemplate the unfolding of a noble tale in a book, a motion picture, or a television play, or when we have read of or witnessed a genuinely noble, touching or heroic action in real life. So poignant and so exquisite is the experience, we are moved perforce to tears, which we are powerless to fight back, tears that well from an indescribable and measureless joy—tears from the depths of some divine ecstasy—as though our inmost being responded like a finely tuned instrument to the touch of a master's hand. And indeed and indeed our inmost fiber is tuned, I believe, to the ethical law of God, and every noble act strikes a deep responsive chord within us.

Those who follow what they conceive to be the "nobler" way, I feel sure, do not do so BECAUSE they are certain that God exists or even on the "outside" chance that He might exist. Generally speaking too, such persons do not profess faith in the validity of ethical truth or in the existence of ethical values because they anticipate a reward for their faith, nor yet because they fear punishment if they should contravene the ethical law which their faith posits.

Rather I believe they strive to follow along the paths of high integrity and ethical endeavor because they are—perhaps without being fully aware of the fact—entranced or in love with the beauty of ethical truth and action. They sense in moral or ethical "rightness" the perfect union of what we normally conceive as the valid subjects of ethics AND aesthetics. To such as these, a noble act possesses symmetry and form. Contrariwise, they perceive the slime that sticks on filthy deeds. At this point, I am strongly reminded of some words written by the renowned English poet, Keats—cryptic words, the deep-down meaning of which might easily elude us:

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. . . .
> —*Ode to a Grecian Urn.*

For many years I could not grasp the potential meaning of this tantalizing dictum of Keats. The thought seems beautifully enough expressed, but is there any substance, any validity behind the words, or do they merely make up a poetic conundrum to give a moment's pleasance to the reader's mind or ear?

The "truth" to which Keats had reference might verily have been constituted of the achingly lovely beauty (for example) of noble and heroic thought and action. Perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson in the Divinity School Address quoted above, caught a glimpse too of this great and fundamental truth when he declared in this same address:

> The "OUGHT" (that is to say, the soul of ethics or the soul of the ethical law) is one thing (viz., is identical) with "BEAUTY". . . .

Perhaps too this same conjunction of the ethical and aesthetic explains why the world fell in love with, and took to its heart the story about Jesus—because the world believed the "account" of his life involved a beautifully rounded act of sacrifice in a most noble cause.

Of course many do not stop to think that the elements of sacrifice and nobility in the story about Jesus are present ONLY IF Jesus were a man—a man in every respect—like you and I. For if Jesus were divine in any unique sense, he could not have suffered from the pangs of uncertainty as we do, and hence could not be considered to have made any genuine and noble sacrifice at all. Let us see if we can make this clear.

He of all men who ever lived, and he alone—if the Christian doctrines regarding his divinity hold true—KNEW FOR CERTAIN what lay beyond the veil that thwarts the merely "human" eye. He alone would have had SURE KNOWLEDGE. He would not even have had to have faith because, being divine, he would have known the ultimate truths. Faith is needed only where certain knowledge is lacking. It follows that Jesus could never have had a moment of genuine anguish such as you and I are every day subject to, because of our uncertainty.

The theorem is then complete: psychologically, it would have been impossible for Jesus to have suffered in any real sense, knowing as he did (if he were a Divine Being indeed) that he would be restored to perfect physical and mental comfort within a few hours.

Bulwarked by this certain knowledge of how things stood and how things would turn out in the end, Jesus could have endured ANYTHING without real anguish, without real suffering, without the "passion" theologians claim. There is certainly no virtue or beautiful nobility in going through the motions of suffering when no real suffering is felt. Such dissimulation would deserve no accolade. Yet dissimulation is exactly what we accuse Jesus of when we insist he was divine.

I think that we might say this, and without fear of contradiction, that of all men who ever lived Jesus was the most maligned. At first blush one might think it some honor—nay, a great honor to a man —to be called "God" or to be elevated to the rank of Godhood by his fellows or by theologians. But on second thought, what must be evident at once is that by "accusing" him of being God, we deprive him of any great or heroic glory to which he might justly be entitled AS A MAN. We defraud him of his just praise.

For if he were truly "divine," he made no sacrifice to speak of, for the very simple and obvious reason that he would KNOW that he was not risking anything nor was he actually laying down his life, because he KNEW full well that death for him was but a bridge to a more glorious state. On the other hand, as a man he might be regarded as risking much, or giving up the sure and treasured possession of life in exchange for what is, for humankind at least, unsure.

As a man too he would have suffered from the deep anguish of uncertainty: faith might sustain him indeed in his manly hours of courage and trial, but faith—by its very definition—implies a lack of CERTAIN knowledge. As God, he could not claim this or any uncertainty, because if he were God he would have had to KNOW.

Just as we can, as the saying goes, "damn" (or condemn as a failure) a play or a book, etc., with "faint praise," so at the other end of the pendulum's swing, we can damn with too much praise. By "overpraising" Jesus, by putting him (so to speak) on a divine pedestal—and this seems praise of the highest order indeed!—we actually slander him and malign his name, and make it appear that he pretended to go through the motions of an anguish he could NOT feel, and a death he KNEW would not result in any "personal" loss to him.

Were he "God" in any sense, death would naturally hold none of the evil or dread or unhappy possibilities it holds for the like of us. Fortunately, we have mathematical proof of Jesus' HUMAN nature, from his own lips, so that his individual sincerity cannot be impugned, although if not the sincerity, at least the acumen or logical discernment of those who called him God may be properly indicted or most seriously questioned. The mathematical proof is found in the book of Mark, and consists of Jesus' dying exclamation, duly recorded in this earliest written account of Jesus' life (previously quoted on several other occasions in these pages):

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me . . . ?

If these words were written in letters twelve feet high, their meaning could hardly be made clearer. The outcry indicates for one thing that Jesus (who was supposed to be part of the Godhead himself) thought that "God" had forsaken him. How God could forsake "Himself" is ridiculously inconceivable, and that Jesus—if he were God—would even think so is preposterous.

For another thing, this outcry establishes further that Jesus was NOT aware that he was supposed to die to atone for "our" sin, thus exploding the whole doctrine of redemption and its corollary doctrine, Incarnation. Had Jesus been a divine entity, a part or "person" of the Godhead, he must have surely known that his death was in perfect accord with the DIVINE PLAN of Atonement, agreed or decided upon by him and his purported God-partners beforehand, and that what he was going through therefore was a necessary part of the plan.

To explain away this incredible cry—and incredible it is if Jesus were the Incarnation of Deity—some orthodox commentators have actually contended that Jesus was reciting poetry! They base their argument on the fact that similar words appear in one of the psalms. Of course, acceptance of such a theory would forever end any claim that Jesus "suffered." His so-called Passion would be a laughable hoax, for it is inconceivable that any one actually suffering or undergoing excruciating physical pain or under stress of intense mental anguish, or in the throes of agony, and upon the weak brink of death, would set about to calmly recite poetry.

Other Christian commentators, realizing how pitiably attenuated and inadequate this attempted explanation sounds, simply throw up their hands (in a manner of speaking) and declare that the words can not mean what they say. The mountainous perils attendant upon such a declaration we have elsewhere examined. For if we cannot accept one word in the Bible at its face value or usual meaning, we cannot accept any, and the Bible becomes worthless as a guide to any man.

Which of us would not undergo the most horrible tortures imaginable almost joyously if we were buoyed up by the CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE that when our earthly tortures ceased, as they must —if not in minutes, then in years—we would of a certainty find ourselves in a state of serene equanimity, with our every faculty and organ restored to its pristine condition. We could spurn physical pain, knowing that such pain could not rob us of a certain future, a future certain and eternal, after our brief period of bodily affliction, dire though it might be.

But contrast what anguish we must suffer in the face of uncertainty as to our future predicament. I can only repeat that Jesus did not—because in fact he could not—"suffer" in any real sense IF HE WERE GOD or a Divine Incarnation. It was impossible psychologically for him to suffer at all if he entertained no uncertainty as to the ultimate outcome of his ordeal, however severe the physical pain might have been.

The skilled physician, who knows the stages through which a disease must run, is not too concerned for an ailing child. He KNOWS all will be well in a given interval. But mark the real anguish of the parents who do not share the Doctor's greater knowledge. Even when the Doctor assures them that all will be well, they lack his relatively more "certain" knowledge. Whilst they may indeed bask in his comforting assurance, they may feel that perhaps he offers such assurance —it has been done—only to spare them present anguish. At the best, theirs is faith, but his is, by relation, certain knowledge. Jesus' presumptively greater certainty—if he had divine knowledge regarding the larger issue of death—would follow the same pattern. His sure knowledge of the innocent harmlessness of death, or his sure knowledge of the happy sequel to death, would take the sting out of any possible anguish he might otherwise feel if he did not possess this knowledge.

One point that it might be well for us to clarify is that the moral and psychological considerations already discussed in this chapter should be, in and of themselves, sufficient to indicate at least the POSSIBILITY that God was in no way involved in the authorship of the Bible or in the establishment of the Christian doctrines purportedly derived from the latter portion (viz., the New Testament portion) of this book.

If the Bible and Christian doctrinology put God in a morally degrading light—as they do—and if, as we have seen, the doctrines regarding Jesus cannot be vindicated on psychological grounds, it seems to me that we have little choice except to conclude that God could have had no hand in either. Furthermore, under the circumstances it would be highly irreverent for us—and an affront to God—to knowingly affirm that He was any way involved in either.

The moral and psychological considerations we have been discussing should be considered and weighed quite apart from the many tangible evidences presented in previous chapters. These more "objective" evidences, in my opinion, transform the "possibility" that God was in in no way involved in the authorship of the Bible or Christian doctrinology into a virtual, if not a categorical certainty that He was not. For me the tangible evidences, when I uncovered them one by one, merely corroborated (often in unexpected ways) the conclusions my own inner ethical sense had insisted MUST be correct, conclusions that were sustained by every day common sense as well.

Another Christian doctrine that my conscience rejected as probably mistaken was the doctrine that any human being should be compelled (or, if you will, permitted) to hide behind the skirts of Jesus for "salvation," rather than that we should, each of us, stand or fall or be "judged" on the basis of our own individual endeavors. According to the doctrine commonly held, it appears that salvation can be achieved ONLY through Jesus; and I quote from the FORGED gospel of John:

> John 14: 6 No man cometh unto the Father, but by me. . . .

The idea itself of salvation, which implies after all that only some souls shall be preserved and necessarily infers therefore that some shall not (except they be preserved for endless torture)—this concept of salvation, I say, strikes me now as highly questionable from the viewpoint of ethical justice, although in my youthful years, after a decent amount of exposure to Christian indoctrination, this idea seemed ethically plausible.

There was one thing about salvation that much perturbed me however, namely the terms on which it was to be achieved. Apparently no amount of earnest endeavor or right motivation would bring us favor with God, a circumstance which seemed strange and puzzling. Only a formal or a professed belief in Jesus as our Saviour or as the Son of God would serve in this respect, which seemed stranger still. Besides, it seemed to savor somewhat of cowardice to hide thus behind another's skirts and not stand squarely on one's own feet and take the licks that were coming to us.

With advancing years and a broadening concept of God, it has become increasingly clear to me that such a theory of salvation MUST be wrong if God possesses the infinite understanding and the high morality we universally ascribe to Him. I believe now that whatever the future holds for us after death it holds, in all probability, equally for all, and no one shall undergo severely punitive or endless torments at the hands of our putative Creator.

The God I envision—and, I submit, the only Being worthy the name of "God"—would be a God of deep understanding, infinite forgiveness, and boundless mercy, and a Being whose every motion would serve as an exemplar of the highest moral law. The God behind God would be this very moral law, for if God is not "governed" by or (to express it another way) does not work entirely within the moral statutes of justice and total love, it were better we had never been born, for all our hopes would be ciphers.

In our new state after death, God might educate us, if "educate" is the correct word (the word "rehabilitate" has too much of the flavor of the prisonhouse or reformatory about it), but He would not boil us in oil or roast us like spiders over a quenchless fire, turning us gloatingly, world without end, on a slowly rotating spit. God might conceivably permit our personalities merely to die away with our bodies and we would be plunged, in a manner of speaking, into a painless, insensate state to the end of time, never again to wake to glorious consciousness, or be troubled by anxious thoughts.

But the very thought of such a contingency, as we think upon it, crowds the mind with a sense of utter hopelessness and futility, and is accompanied too by frank disbelief that a God of Love and a God possessing the ethical sensitivity we attribute to Him, could possibly or conceivably deal so harshly, so cruelly, or so unfeelingly with His creatures. We cannot believe that He could awake them momentarily to consciousness but to tease them with the large discourse of reason and the contemplation of things beyond the reaches of their souls, giving them powers of love and comprehension, supplying them too with the faculty to appreciate beauty and instilling in them a soaring ethical sense—granting them all this, only to permit it to waste away into nothingness.

While it can admittedly be "conceived" as possible that God might so bountifully give, and then despoil us of His gifts, yet to me such a contingency would involve an impossible moral contradiction, unless the God behind God—that is to say, the ruling principle of God's nature—is not the exemplar of moral or ethical perfection we posit as belonging peculiarly to God. We have no right of course to assume that this IS a facet of the ultimate truth about God, but such an assumption must of necessity underlie all faith.

To be awakened to all the glories of the physical Universe, and to all the fascinating powers of an alert mind, is a bounty of the most magnificent sort. The fancied treasures of Ind, the fabled wealth of Midas, the proverbial riches of the sea, are niggling trifles when we contemplate the munificence of OUR endowments. The Creative Intelligence which brought us and our Universe into being worked with no niggard or parsimonious hand.

In the face of such princely profusion, such unstinted prodigality, it would be difficult to believe that an Entity capable of such ready liberality did not have kindness of heart equal to this clear disposition to confer gifts of such rare prize so unsparingly. We are led to inferentially conjecture that God MUST be as magnanimous as He is munificent.

On the other hand, we would have to conclude that God must needs be a moral Monster indeed if He endowed us so richly and then made no provision for us except annihilation. Such ruthlessness, such unkindness, such downright cruelty, would hardly accord with the divine nature as we conceive it. Personally, I refuse to believe that God or any basically intelligent being could harbor such evil traits.

Certainly the world created by God (or the Intelligence we call God) appears reasonable and intelligible, for it is amenable to understanding. It appears dependable too in the sense that its mechanistic workings are apparently subject to what we call "laws" that are themselves consistent, constant, universal, and intelligible. It has therefore seemed to many that only a God who is Himself reasonable and dependable could have conceived such a world.

In addition, matter (or "energy" or whatever it is that exists) is magically capable of producing consciousness, so that this matter or whatnot seems to bear within its very essence the seeds of purposeful development, adapting itself—as it does—to the simplest forms of so-called inorganic matter and just as readily to the most complex organic conformations that produce what we call instinct in the lower animals and consciousness in the human species.

In all this we can scarcely fail to detect built-in purpose or fail to discern built-in direction and control. The potential of the brain of a Shakespeare is then seen to be present in the seemingly cold and inert dust of interstellar space-clouds. Surely it is not Chance alone that makes this Protean matter capable of following certain patterns of behavior, so to speak, till it evolve from its simpler inorganic forms to more highly developed organic entities, and thence, apparently by a compulsive cooperation, to an awareness of itself and to the glorious consciousness we humans experience.

One phase of the amazing propensity toward "cooperation" found in matter is commonly known as Evolution. The theory of Evolution, often denounced by religionists as serving or tending to undermine belief in God, is—by a strange irony, it seems to me, and as I have elsewhere suggested—one of the STRONGEST evidences of God's existence. Evolution may indeed seriously impugn the historic authenticity of the story of Creation set forth in the Bible—but what of that? More important by far to all of us is to find intelligible, tangible evidence of God's existence, and the process of Evolution certainly seems to provide it, inasmuch as it demonstrates visibly that something else besides blind and eyeless Chance is at work in the behavior of matter.

Human Evolution is a great and important truth and should be embraced as such. Be assured that no truth—scientific or other—can ever harm God or destroy religion. If the Bible is not God's Word, it is better that we face this truth squarely rather than that we ignore it or try to shout it down in fanatical tirades or, for that matter, resort to subterfuge to make its ancient statements and conjectures fit the new knowledges we have won or come heir to.

A religion founded upon myth or error is like a house built upon a foundation of loose sand washed by the restless tide. Such a religion may appear, superficially, to be sound; but even most of those who apparently accept its tenets have sufficient mental discernment to suspect that its foundations are indeed set upon shifting sands, and therefore, whilst they may give it due lip service to satisfy the demands of convention, their heart and brain are never seriously engaged in its service and their lives are lived outside its environs.

Religion becomes something to graciously curtsy to, come Sunday, but something to be quickly and gingerly laid aside after the Sunday service has ended. It becomes something too which is hardly ever referred to in ordinary conversation, as if only fools would waste their precious breath upon it, or as if it were an "improper" topic of conversation, to be avoided like the plague.

It seems to me that if religion is to be made an effective force in the life of the world, it must be built on a rock-bottom of reason. If religion is to appeal to the intelligent young people of today, it must be "reasonable": that is to say, it must provide cogent reasons for believing in God, or for believing in the validity of the moral law or high ethics. It will still require a large measure of faith on their part, but a faith that is supported by tangible evidence, like that provided by the FACT of Evolution; or again, such palpable and apparently reasonable evidence as may be provided—for example—by the so-called "second" law of thermo-dynamics, which seems to be a well-established fact in every field of observation presently open to man.

Most of us, I fancy, are somewhat familiar with the first law of thermo-dynamics, namely that of the conservation of energy. According to this basic law, energy is always conserved, though it may undergo a change of form. The second law contemplates the fact that while the amount of energy is constant, it is constantly "diffusing" or dissipating. Under the first law, it is recognized that the amount of energy is constant, and therefore, while there is no diminution of energy in the Universe, there likewise are probably no additions either to the total amount of energy.

It follows from law number two that a time will come when what "useful" or concentrated energy there is, shall be completely diffused and stagnation or quiescence result. We can perhaps best illustrate this by using our Sun as an example. Astronomers and scientists tell us that our Sun is constantly, though ever so slowly, dissipating its energy. These same gentlemen have calculated that the Sun will one day—long eons hence—hang cold and lifeless in the heavens, making the sustenance of life impossible on earth, unless in the meantime a new source of energy is discovered by man.

It appears then that if energy is everywhere within our ken "running down like a clock," as Dr. Inge declares, "the clock must have been wound up (or the energy established in its concentrated form by some force) at a date which we could name if we knew it." This seems to be supported by the phenomenon which makes radiocarbon dating possible. Dr. Inge continues:

> The world, if it is to have an end in time, must have had a beginning in time. . . .

This must be true, because as Prof. D. E. Trueblood points out in his "Logic of Belief":

> A clock which always runs down and is never rewound, cannot have been running forever. . . .

Energy, like an automobile battery which is always discharging and is never re-charged, cannot have been discharging forever. The discharging process must have had a beginning at some point of time in the past. But what is the concernancy of this fact to us? The important thing for us, it seems to me, is that this progressive dissipation or degradation of energy (which is the subject of the so-called law of entropy, viz., that as "useless" energy increases, the "useful" decreases by the same amount) provides evidence that the natural world is NOT self-explanatory. And for a very simple reason.

Everywhere in nature, as far as we can observe it, energy is gradually losing its useful efficacy, or is becoming, as they say, "degraded" or more and more diffused, less and less useful, more and more useless. But this law of energy MUST have been reversed by some other inside or outside FORCE at some time in the past of the Universe. The energy we observe could not have reached its present concentrated condition in the Universe if the second law of thermo-dynamics had been operating as constantly throughout an "infinite" past as it does now.

This inside or outside "force," it can be argued, must be God or some depot of Intelligence, because a purely mechanistic world could not conceivably have reversed its own workings. A mechanistic world would have "kept" its own blind laws and never varied from them—ever. The second law of thermo-dynamics is therefore one possible forceful answer that we are able to offer at least tentatively to conscientious atheists whose underlying belief is that the natural world needs no explanation inasmuch as it might (they say) have existed of itself from eternity.

Even the scant evidence posed by the new science of parapsychology, which attempts to probe and evaluate man's extra-sensory perceptions and the like, may some day give substantiation to the idea that some "force" which is not subject to time or space exists in our amazing Universe.

Man of course can scarcely be absolutely certain of anything, but he can be reasonably certain of many things. For example, it seems far more reasonable to suppose that the Cosmos IS the product of intelligence or purpose rather than the product of pure accident or chance. From the infinitesimally small electrons in the atom to the inconceivably vast galaxies spiralling in space, matter (or "energy") appears to be under definite and measurable and seemingly purposeful controls.

The whole macrocosm (i.e., the great world of which we are a part) is in some sense "governed" and gives every indication of being mathematically engineered, and yet—as philosophers have long been aware—there is far more to reality than mere mathematics, just as the end result of "seeing" is far more than the mechanics of vision. There are many phenomena like beauty, and awareness of beauty which seem to inevitably emerge from the mechanical and mathematical foundations of the Universe:

> What a piece of work is A MAN! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! . . .
>
> —*Shakespeare, Hamlet*: *Act II*, Sc. 2, *line* 298.

Incidentally, in the last words of the above quotation, we might note that long before the theory of Evolution was advanced to establish our "animal" ancestry and kinship, Shakespeare recognized that man was basically an "animal," for he could not call man the "paragon" of animals, if to begin with he did not include him in his own mind in the category of animals. But this classification need carry no derogation if we exercise the powers and faculties that distinguish us from the brute creation.

Why—if the Universe is a "reasonable" product (a product of reason rather than chance), or an "intelligible" entity (an entity capable of being understood by what we describe as "mind")—why, I ask, should we be born into this main of light, this sea of shifting air, but to fall into an abyss of nothingness and mindlessness? I confess that I can see little point to such a blank sequel to life. Our individual lives and personalities would have no permanent meaning, no permanent value, no ultimate sense at all without some meaningful sequel.

As a "doorway" to this sequel, "death" is in a sense desirable, not of course to be deliberately sought as an end in itself, but welcomed when it comes as giving whatever meaning shall or can be given to life. To express it briefly, one might say that without death, life would have no meaning. For without death, we should never be able to escape the limitations of time, space, and physical energy that here narrowly close us in, because as long as we live our personality is bound to the body and its needs and frailties. Without death, we should never travel or pass to that bourne or dimension which shall give significance to our earthly lives, and enable our personalities to burgeon forth into a fullness we cannot achieve, nor indeed conceive of on earth.

Perhaps Socrates had some such thing in mind when he reproached his friends for sorrowing at his impending death. Like Jesus, he too was being executed for his ostensibly "blasphemous" teachings, which he refused to retract or deny. As Socrates calmly pointed out to his friends, we all commonly assume that death is an "evil," whenas it may be—nay, it must be (if there is any meaning at all back of life or the Universe)—the greatest good of all. Now Socrates:

> But now the time has come. . . . I go to die, and you to live, but which of us goes to the better lot is known to none but God. . . .
>
> —*Apol.* 42 a

If there is nothing "beyond," individual life is by and large meaningless, futile and cruel. But we must bear in mind that if we were granted the alternative to live forever here on earth, we should never be able to discover the true meaning of life. Physical immortality on earth would be outstandingly the crowning tragedy, and this would be true none the less even if the physical deterioration of age did not occur. Some reader might reasonably point out that even if there is nothing beyond for us, we should be grateful to God for life nevertheless, because we are granted in the process some few fleeting moments to glimpse the grandeur and scope of the Cosmos and to enjoy the faculties of imagination and reason, moments which otherwise we would never have known.

Such an argument could be answered by putting the question: of what advantage will it be—to US—a thousand years after our death, nay or even one hour after, to have known such loveliness and such power if we cease to "remember," when the blank door of death is shut upon us, leaving us with less mind or memory than a grimacing imbecile, who enjoys still the doubtful boon of life?

But let us briefly return to the Christian theory of salvation which insists that humans can be "saved" only through acceptance of Jesus as our intermediary or saviour, or by a "profession" of faith in the Christian dispensation. It had always seemed wildly inconsistent to me that those who followed what might be termed "evil" ways—for example, those who were inconsiderate of others, impatient, intolerant, arrogant, spiteful, envious, and in general showed ill-will in a thousand ways—should by the mere ritual act of "accepting" Jesus (for instance, by undergoing baptism, participating in the Eucharist or Communion, etc.) be able to attain salvation, whereas others who practiced or made Herculean efforts to achieve amongst their fellows a measure of patience under the most trying circumstances, cheerfulness sometimes in the face of devastating odds, humbleness, "charity" (in the sense of benevolence), and good will—the thousand little nameless acts of kindness and of love that Wordsworth eulogized—

that THESE souls would not be saved if they neglected or failed specifically to accept Jesus or confess faith in the total Christian doctrine, whether failure to do so was based on reasons of conscience or other circumstances (the "accident" of being born into the Moslem or Buddhist cultures, to mention but one).

This Christian scheme of salvation appeared to me to place more emphasis on formalism and ritual than on elements and factors which to me seemed more pertinent by far. I was encouraged in my thinking along these lines by the little I knew or remembered, from the first, of Jesus' teachings. Jesus too seemed to deprecate or disapprove of such strict formalism and ritualism in favor of what he conceived to be the basic moral law:

> Matthew 23: 23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and omit the weightier matters of the (Moral) Law, namely judgment (=consideration?), mercy and faith. . . .

In these words, Jesus clearly stresses the necessary (as he saw it) inward essence of religion. Anyone can "tithe," but tithing (or any similar observance of outward formal righteousness) of itself does not, and cannot fulfill the demands of the moral law.

Again, in verses I shall quote below, Jesus contrasts the scrupulous care the Pharisees were wont to use to assure OUTWARD "ceremonial" or ritual purity of their dishes, etc., with their failure to INly cleanse their hearts and their thoughts of extortion, hypocrisy and the like:

> Matthew 23: 25-27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but within are full of extortion and excess . . . ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outside, but are full of corruption within . . . even so ye OUTWARDLY appear righteous unto men. . . .

Whenever the occasion arose, Jesus insisted on the priority of the moral law over against the perversions (viz., the ritual practices) of religion invented by men so that they might "appear" righteous in their own or others' eyes:

> Mark 7: 7-9 In vain do they worship God, teaching in place of the moral law the commandments of men . . . for laying aside the commandments of God (which Jesus equated with the moral law), ye hold to the traditions of men . . . ye reject the Commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition. . . .

Jesus in other contexts clearly stated what he considered the principal commandments of God, namely to love God and to love our fellow-man as "ourself." Which of us, under challenge, can find any reference to ritual or doctrinal matters in these prime commandments?

To Jesus the moral law was paramount, supreme. It seems to me too that the moral law does NOT require that we undergo baptism, but requires rather for example that we undergo the self-discipline that a life of relative integrity and honor demands. No portion of the moral law ("God's" law if you will) is fulfilled by sacramental Communion (this again is but a commandment or tradition of men), but the moral law rather finds fulfillment, I humbly suggest, in the practice of earnest and thoroughgoing good will towards our fellows.

Patience, consideration, justice, tolerance, a forgiving and cheerful attitude—these are typical and valid "rites" of God's moral law. Let a man observe every Sabbath, attend Church every Sunday, partake of every prescribed sacrament and rite of his church, yea, pray by the book every hour, yet must he practice the more valid rites of God's law or fail to be adjudged by any critical or judicious standard a "religious" man. Those who perform the "formal" rites of religion but neglect the spirit or demands of the moral law are adjudged hypocrites by the teacher whom all Christendom venerates:

> Matthew 23: 23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay your tithe . . . and omit (or neglect) the weightier matters (or "rites" as I term them) of the (moral) law, namely justice, mercy and faith. . . .

Thousands upon thousands tithe their goods, and feel that they have fulfilled a moral obligation unto God. But how much more would we be fulfilling this moral law if we were instead to tithe ourselves, so to speak, by giving generously of our energies in dedication to truth, humanitarian service, good will, and the multiplication of happiness.

Tithing is only a custom (or as Jesus called it, a "tradition" of men), rather than a moral duty. It is certainly a far greater moral duty to display good cheer toward all it is our privilege to meet and mingle with. Perhaps Robert Louis Stevenson had some such thing in mind when he remarked that we should share our courage but keep our "traitor" fears to ourselves.

Of what moral value to a man is a record of perfect Sunday attendance at church, if he displays arrogance, intolerance, spite, impatience, inconsideration, and similar unlovely traits the other six days in the week towards those, for example, from whom he can expect no emolument of worldly success? It is easy enough indeed to be pleasant, exude kindness, and wear the habit of gracious courtesy, yea, and bow and scrape, when we hold congress with those whose patronage we can use in business, socially, or in any situation, where (to borrow Shakespeare's phrase) "thrift" (selfish prosperity or aggrandizement) may follow fawning.

Such masquerade of kindness or seeming good will or even piety requires no tutor. We slip it around us with ease like a capacious cloak when our survival or selfish advancement requires us to do so. But casting such mercenary situations aside, which of us obeys the moral law of good will toward those who, rather than a help to us, may need our present, sometime, or constant help?

Do we meet such individuals half way or—unthinkable!—do we endeavor to go more than half way and grant what they would seek before they ask it? The confirmed cynic might wonder what we can possibly gain by being gracious or by going the second mile with someone who does not presume, or hesitates from timidity or other cause, to ask us to go the first mile.

What we would gain, I believe, is an immediate insight into what kind of a wonderful world we might share if the spirit of the moral law guided our actions, and also a fuller realization of what kind of wonderful Being MUST be responsible for the great world about us if He can implant or inspire such insight in us.

Unfortunately, the basic moral law which should be the principal emphasis of all church groups is today, as it was yesterday and as it was in Jesus' times, largely neglected in favor of ritual, ceremonial, sacramental and doctrinal matters. The very formalism which Jesus decried in religious worship is with us still and continues to coldly haunt the pulpit and the pew.

Chapter Eight: The Church of the Future

Not all Christian denominations, and certainly not all individual members of such sectarian groups believe in, or seriously accept as true all of the tenets, dogmas and doctrines of traditional Christian theology, such as the Virgin Birth; the Christian theory of Atonement; the "Passion" of Jesus; his bodily Resurrection; the Ascension of Jesus; the Immaculate Conception (the idea that Mary alone of all women WAS BORN without "original sin"); the whole theory of Original Sin, arising from Adam and Eve's purported disobedience; the doctrine that the Bible is God's Word or God's Inspired Revelation; the dogma that a principal Devil exists, whom we call Satan, and many other minor devils; the further doctrine that states that a place of eternal torment has been prepared from the foundation by God; the doctrine of predestination and God's Elect; the Godhood or unique Divine nature of Jesus; the validity of Sacred Prophecy; the doctrine that baptism is necessary for salvation; belief in the naive story of Adam and Eve as historic fact; belief in the efficacy of Communion or the Eucharist; the existence and hierarchy of Angels; etc.

Many readers who profess to be Christians will recognize at least one or several of the doctrines, dogmas and beliefs listed above which they no longer accept in earnest, or in which their belief is neither clear-cut nor enthusiastic. Their acceptance of such dogmas is not, for example, as whole-hearted as their belief in the Golden Rule, or as earnest as their belief in God—these things they sincerely believe in, the others they may docilely accept but without any deep emotional involvement.

Some cannot accept the Bible as God's literal Word, because of the Bible's many and manifest contradictions, errors and inconsistencies, and because of the morally degrading picture it paints of God in some passages; some cannot accept the incredible theory of atonement whereby God's purported anger with man because of Adam's disobedience is supposedly and curiously appeased by the savage murder of His supposed son by Adam's progeny (Jesus' ignorance of the plan of Atonement, betrayed in Mark 15: 34, does not help matters); others cannot accept the miracles of healing with their puzzling exorcism of inoculating "demons," entities which no longer exist in our time, and the strange circumstance that these demons could, like the serpent in Eden, carry on an audible and quite intelligible conversation with those who addressed them; nor can they believe the other miracles because they too are contrary to the uninterrupted natural order as we find it exists today; again, some cannot believe that a loving, compassionate and forgiving God could possibly provide a place of torment with fires that burned eternally and without mercy; many more simply cannot believe in Jesus' divinity, when Jesus himself clearly denies it in the Scriptures; still others cannot believe that the story of the virgin birth is at all credible, especially in face of the fact, demonstrated in an earlier chapter—a fact duly recorded in the gospels themselves—that his own parents seem to have been ignorant of it, and they, if anyone, would certainly have had to know about it IF IT HAD HAPPENED.

We could go on, but is there not already much cause to wonder that so many of us still accept some of these strange and incredible doctrines advanced by the early Christian Church to help explain (among other things) why Jesus, despite his supposed divinity and divine power, had died so ignominiously?

For many decades now, professedly orthodox groups and individuals who consider themselves "orthodox," have begun to reject—if not openly, at least by subterfuge—one or more aspects of Christian doctrinology, because for one thing, as we have attempted to demonstrate in these pages, many traditional dogmas are frankly no longer tenable —are no longer believable—in view of man's increased knowledge of the planet he inhabits, his increased knowledge of nature as a whole, and his increased knowledge of how the Bible was written.

Take for example the story of Creation found in Genesis. Many earnest Christians have for all intents and purposes rejected this story by the subterfuge of interpreting the six "days" figuratively as six vast geologic eons, to harmonize the Bible story with the undeniable and overwhelming evidence uncovered by geologists, paleontologists, and many other investigators. It is my strong conviction that any interpretation other than one that is based on the very plain and literal signification of the words themselves AS THEY APPEAR IN THE BIBLE, must be considered a rejection of the Bible's authenticity.

There are many Christians too who accept the now well-established fact of man's apparent evolution from more humble organic forms, and yet glibly declare that the story of man's creation in Genesis is NOT inconsistent with this widely accepted principle of evolution. They interpret the words in the Genesis story symbolically, as thus: man was "created" out of the dust by an evolutionary process which was set in motion by God—and the language in the Bible which states that God made man out of the dust does not mean that He actually made man "all at once," or at one sitting, but merely that He set in motion forces that would eventually produce man.

If we wish to be entirely honest with ourselves, we must recognize that such symbolical or figurative interpretation of the simple language in this or any Bible passage is clearly a kind of subterfuge. The motive for indulging in subterfuge such as this may be a good, or even a very pious one, to wit, to avoid throwing doubt on the authenticity of the Bible's claim to Divine inspiration, and thus (but the presumption is a mistaken one) presumably undermining whatever power the Bible may possess for good. I humbly submit that regardless of motive, it is nonetheless subterfuge.

Some Christians feel that if the Creation story is not accepted as historically true (in other words, if the story is conceded to be only a myth invented by man), then other passages or stories in the Bible may be similarly rejected as unhistoric, like the story of Noah and the Flood (examined in Chapter Three), as well as the passage for example that tells of Moses meeting God on the mountain of Sinai (or Horeb) face to face, and receiving from Him the Ten Commandments—whichever of the two different sets of ten commandments in the Bible we are inclined to accept as the "authentic" ten.

Such well-intentioned doctrinaire Christians reason that if passage after passage in the Bible is found to be demonstrably unhistoric (and therefore false or fraudulent), this continuing demonstration of inauthenticity might easily destroy the Bible's over-all religious value. By resorting to symbolical interpretation of these and other Bible passages, these unquestionably sincere Christian scholars, commentators, and teachers assume that they are doing what they can to preserve the religious values of the Bible. But my opinion is that religious values, where present, can and more importantly should be preserved WITHOUT SUBTERFUGE, and with complete honesty.

In religion, I submit, everything should be particularly above any suspicion of rigging and clearly bear upon it the honest scent of candor and integrity. If we must have a religion based on subterfuge, which is connived at by the clergy, it is worth very little to us, for it not only gives us no model of forthrightness, absolute candor or simple straightforward integrity, but on the contrary such a religion would teach or encourage us to use the same palliative measures that we use in Biblical interpretation, in our ethical dealings with others.

This is hardly the star we should guide our course by. Particularly is this attitude dangerous for young people, who may suddenly discover the bare-faced subterfuge and apparent hypocrisy, without comprehending the pious motives behind it. If the star of Bethlehem is a myth, we had better hitch our wagon to another star, rather than pretend to believe that there was indeed such a star as that which the so-called Magi or Wise Men are said to have "followed." One might at this point question frankly whether we should attempt to rear even one small portion of our religious edifice upon an absurd pretense that every high school boy can see through.

What must the young folk think of us older folk when we pretend to be hoodwinked by such a tale as that of the "star" of Bethlehem! How can they trust our judgment in any matter, including ethical counsellings, if we show ourselves so easily duped?

> Matthew 1: 9 And lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child (Jesus) was. . . .

Every high school boy knows that it is impossible to "follow" a star as it is related the Magi did, and that no star could be said to "stand" in the sky in such a way as to "point to" a manger or any other terrestrial object. A star's immensity and vast distance from the earth make such an event greatly impossible, unless of course stars were vastly smaller, and infinitely nearer in the days of Herod than they are now—which is hardly within the range of probability.

From our own experience we know that a star in the night sky may seem to stand over a huge tree, but as we draw near the tree, the star draws away and seems now to stand farther off over another tree on the farther horizon; to other observers, from other vantage points, the same star may here seem to stand over a mountain peak and there stand over a body of water, and yet if these observers too moved toward the objects over which the star seemed to stand, they too would discover that now it was apparently luminous above still other objects.

The story of the borning star told in the Bible is without question a most beautifully conceived story, instinct with ancient poetic fancy and fabricated of the same golden thread as many another beautiful story of man's early inventive fancy, but it cannot be the report of a true happening unless we live in a different world than that in which the author of the book of Matthew lived.

Elsewhere in this book we have moreover shown that the writer of Matthew was not and could not in any case have been a native of Palestine nor could he have been the disciple Matthew, a fact established on several important grounds, not the least of which is the circumstance that if he had been a Palestinian Jew, he would not have had to quote from a GREEK translation of Isaiah (which had been erroneously translated from the Hebrew), for he would then no doubt have been familiar with the original and correct version of Isaiah in Hebrew.

The passage which only in the Greek mistranslation foretold a "virgin" birth, as we have demonstrated in a previous chapter, merely told (in the Hebrew version) of the birth of one who was to be named Immanuel, by a "young woman" (NOT a "virgin"). The Greek translator who mis-translated the "young woman" into a virgin made a blunder that still echoes in the Twentieth Century.

Besides, if the author of Matthew wrote long after the events actually occurred in Jesus' life, as he appears to have done according to Matthew 28: 15, where the phrase "to this day" indicates the intervention of a considerable period of time, he could hardly have had personal knowledge, or first-hand knowledge, of the events attending Jesus' birth, least of all would he have had personal knowledge of the "star."

Had he been a disciple of Jesus, which however he was not, he could perhaps have learned details of the birth story from Jesus or Jesus' parents, but this again would not have been PERSONAL first-hand knowledge; however, nowhere—nowhere in the gospels—does Jesus refer to his miraculous birth, for example to corroborate his authority, etc., and on no occasion does Jesus drop the slightest hint that he was aware that he was born miraculously or in a manner different from other men, except of course in the forged book of John.

In the forged gospel of John (written, as scholars have now determined, in the Second Century A.D.) all references to his birth, NORMAL or VIRGIN, are deliberately omitted, and he is now represented as coming apparently full-grown from "above," much as Minerva in the Greek mythology is said to have sprung full-grown from Jupiter's brow.

If all subterfuge in the interpretation of the Bible, whether by symbolism or otherwise, were abandoned by all, such a policy might indeed lead to disbelief in the Bible's claim to Divine Authorship or Divine Inspiration, but this is a consummation devoutly to be wished: because, as we can see, such disbelief could not help but redound to God's honor; and from a practical point of view, would bring surcease to the sectarian dis-unity which plagues the Judeo-Christian and Christian communities.

It would necessarily redound to God's honor, because for one thing, as we have elsewhere attempted to demonstrate, if we continue to believe that the passage in Joshua (where it is stated that the sun stood miraculously still in the heavens for several hours) narrates an authentic, historic event, then we must conclude that the God of the Bible, Yahweh—the God whom Christians and Jews alike worship as the God who created heaven and earth, and the God whom all Christians and Jews are taught to love—is little short of a moral monster.

For, as we are told, this prolongation of the day's light was granted, according to God's own testimony (IF THE BIBLE IS HIS WORD), to permit the Israelites to complete the massacre and butchery of the armies of those whose lands they were invading and stealing—and stealing, be it noted, with God's consent and active comfort and aid. All this too in spite of the Commandments presumptively issued by God Himself which thunder: THOU SHALT NOT KILL and THOU SHALT NOT STEAL. Certainly God's example would be a poor model to pattern our own behavior after.

Those who try to explain away the apparent errors and inconsistencies in the Bible, or attempt to reconcile them with the "revelations" of science, or with the teachings or precepts of experience, are inevitably reduced—and more and more—to subterfuge, although, as I have said, those guilty of this subterfuge justify themselves or salve their consciences by assuring themselves that their motives for so doing are good and pious motives.

But is not any such subterfuge actually dishonest, and where sacred things are involved, a kind of serious impiety? If we must make an exception in our earnest reverence for truth, should this exception be, of all things, in the field of religion? Should not on the contrary our every motion where religion is concerned, be particularly clear of any taint of moral turpitude or suspicion of rigging?

Ethics in the business world may be sometimes a little grayed by circumstances and competition, and find a half-hearted justification in our eyes, but ethics in religion I believe should be maintained at a glaring whiteness, untouched by any worldly consideration, or any consideration other than unadulterated truth. The danger to young people is too great to pursue any other policy, for if once they discover the subterfuge—and they assuredly will and do discover it—their suspicions against religious pretence of any kind may be aroused to the point of rejection, and they may conclude that religion is indeed a colossal sham.

Teenagers particularly must be dealt with honestly, if we would earn their confidence. Subtle double-talk may do, when we adults hold congress or deal with each other, but young people want to be dealt with in complete honesty, or they will grow suspicious that the faith or integrity or high principle we inculcate is a pretence, put on perhaps for their edification, and that the religious cloak we wear is just a disguise and but hides our spiritual bankruptcy.

In their determined and centuries-long attempts to combat and eliminate the employment of subterfuge and all possible traces of unwarranted pretence in religion, I believe that the Unitarians are performing an important, necessary and salutary service. As a group, the Unitarians are of course merely doing openly what members of a great many other relatively liberal Christian sects are doing privately; that is, they are refusing to accept whole-heartedly, or without large mental reservations, ANY doctrine just on someone else's say-so, or without appropriate evidence.

Like millions of Christians, and members of other religious groups, most Unitarians believe in God, but—like them too—they recognize that His existence cannot be proved or demonstrated in the same definite way in which we can prove a mathematical theorem. Unitarians, when they believe in God however, believe in His existence on evidence external to, and quite apart from the Bible, and for this reason—even if they are inarticulate upon the subject—do not like to see Him accused (and "accused" is the word for it) of having supernaturally inspired or written the Bible, for there are many passages in the Bible which do not measure up to the high standard of morality which they, together with all other religious groups, envision as belonging peculiarly to the Divine nature.

Besides those who belong to one Christian sect or another, who believe in God, there is another group of persons often called "agnostics" who may be considered, in every sense of the word, religious: quite as religious (for example) as those who profess belief in God. This agnostic group is a numerous one, more numerous than we may upon the whole suspect; and many members of this group associate themselves with no church; although again, if the truth were known, there are probably at least some with the agnostic outlook in ALL church affiliations.

Agnostics, according to my understanding of their philosophy, DO NOT DENY the existence of God as the thoroughgoing atheist does, but merely insist that any knowledge of God and His nature is beyond human comprehension. They believe further that it is therefore altogether presumptuous for any of us to go about making dogmatic assertions about Him, until we have incontrovertible or unimpeachable evidence or information to sustain such assertions.

Agnostics as a rule are deeply religious persons and for the most part hold to an elevated code of honor and entertain a lofty sense of dedication to their fellows. Their towering respect for integrity is reflected in their refusal to assert about God something of which they themselves cannot, in the nature of things, possess categorically certain knowledge. Their integrity or conscience apparently does not permit them to deceive others—or themselves—by stating or believing as a fact that which they do not know with absolute certainty to be a fact.

The evidence which you or I might consider sufficient to affirm God's existence, agnostics may for example consider quite circumstantial and open to at least reasonable doubt. And the truth is that it is not sure knowledge on our part, but faith that enables those of us who do so believe, to affirm belief in God's existence. Even so, we are all agnostic to some degree, admitting as we must, even when we believe firmly in His existence, that God's nature is unknowable to us except in the broadest and barest outline, or by indirection or inference.

Furthermore, the agnostic might reasonably question whether belief in God or love of God are primary criterions whereby we may measure or test a man's religion, or lack of it. After all, it is clear that regardless of man's belief or his mere profession of belief in God, God's approbation, it seems to me, would necessarily be extended to a man who endeavors earnestly to keep himself attuned or in intimate harmony with the moral law, a law which most of us who believe in God intuitively feel certain that God has as surely established as the more obvious physical "laws" of matter, gravitation, magnetism and motion.

In one sense then, the agnostic I have described is very much like Abou Ben Adhem, in the poem of the same name, of whom it could not be affirmatively stated that he "loved" God, but who could nevertheless in all honesty declare that he cherished or loved his fellow man. The poet gives such a man his critical approbation by inferring that men such as he are often visited, ABOVE ALL OTHERS, with God's blessing; or to put it another way, the actions of men such as Abou, are or would be (the poet believes) signally approved by God. Indeed, what other interpretation can we give this familiar and much-loved poem?

> Abou Ben Adhem, may his tribe increase!
> Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace
> And saw, within the moonlight of his room,
> Making it rich and like a lily in bloom,
> An Angel writing in a book of gold.
> Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold
> And to the presence in the room he said
> "What writest thou?" The vision raised its head,
> And with a look made of all sweet accord,
> Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
> "And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
> Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low
> But cheerily still, and said, "I pray thee then,
> Write me as one who loves his fellow men."
> The Angel wrote and vanished. The next night
> It came again with a great awakening light
> And showed the names of those whom love of God had blest
> And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Like the author of this poem, the agnostic feels strongly that God, or the Supreme Intelligence responsible for the Universe, would necessarily be more greatly "pleased" by one who actively bears good will toward his fellow man than one who professes belief in or love of God, but who neglects the code of honor, warm fellowship, and active good will in his relations with others, or who neglects thorough sincerity and foursquare or total honesty in his religious beliefs and protestations.

As we have seen in a previous chapter, John Milton set out, in "Paradise Lost," to "justify" God's ways (that is, God's behavior or method of proceeding toward man, according to Christian doctrinological beliefs, based on the Bible story of Adam and Eve), but he nonetheless also clearly reveals a belief similar to that expressed by the author of "Abou Ben Adhem," when he declares in his invocation to the Deity:

> . . . And Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
> Before all temples, THE UPRIGHT HEART AND PURE,
> Instruct me. . . .

Can there actually be the slightest doubt in any reader's mind that God—if He exists indeed—does, or would, or indeed MUST prefer an upright heart and its progeny above mere "Churchianity" with its emphasis on profession of faith, empty ritualism, and absurd doctrinology? Be assured, one act of real kindness or good will is of more prize in the eyes of God—the heart whispers it MUST be so—than twenty empty professions of love or twenty prostrations in abject homage before what passes for "His" altar in this world, and of more worth in His sight than a dozen Councils of Nicea solemnly casting ballots to determine for all time whether Jesus is, or is not, God. Casting ballots to ascertain Jesus' divinity would be tantamount to deciding a man's age by majority vote.

The spirit of liberalism in religion was present even in the early centuries of Christianity, and the debates between early Christian bishops who held opposite views of Jesus (some insisting he was a man, some clamorous that he was God) were bitter and venomous. This is an historic fact which any reader can readily confirm.

The diametrically opposite views held regarding Jesus were irreconcilable, so that in the end one faction had to force its "opinion" on the other if any kind of ecclesiastical or church unity was to be achieved. Looking back, it seems the supreme tragedy of Christian religious history that the advocates of out-and-out dogma won out over the advocates of tolerance, reason, and common sense, and that the dogmatists proceeded to fit their iron collar on the Christian community for so many centuries.

In point of fact the iron collar tightened and tightened century after century, until Luther in 1517 boldly launched what was to be the first effective "protest" against the established doctrinology of the Roman Christian Church. Unfortunately however, Luther chose to retain intact MOST of the Christian doctrines taught by the Roman Church, denying fiercely though the doctrine that ascribed supreme authority to the Pope at Rome as Jesus' vicar or successor on earth.

Still and all, Luther's action was by this much at least a liberalizing step, and a giant stride forward for his times. Men like Luther and Calvin lighted the way—often with their own bodies as a torch—and it took mountainous courage indeed for them to take the first small steps they hazarded toward religious emancipation. Their "protests" and the protests of others who followed them, led to what historians now call the "protest-ant" movement, or Protestantism. From that time forward, there were two Christendoms, which soon grew to twenty, and then to hundreds, as sect after sect broke away and proclaimed its independence, and staked its claim to God's peculiar favor.

As the centuries passed, one or two Protestant groups emancipated themselves more and more from the dogmas of the past, but by and large most of the "protesting" groups became, one must needs report with regret, as dogmatic after their fashion as the Church from which they had originally seceded, and they remain so to this very day.

They had emancipated themselves from one dogmatic religious regimen, only to fall into a new, equally rigid religious dogmatism. They had overthrown one authority, the Papal rule of Rome, and had become enslaved to another tyranny, namely the rock-ribbed authority of the Bible, which their leaders insisted was the true and exclusive Word of God, and therefore as infallible as the Pope, and the sole source and oracle of religious truth.

But so vague, contradictory and ambiguous was the voice of this Protestant authority, the Bible, that hundreds upon hundreds of Christian Protestant denominations were inevitably spawned, each claiming that its interpretation of the Bible's vagueness and ambiguity was the correct one, and that all other interpretations were wrong or mistaken, and that adherents of these other interpretations should be branded—and burned, if possible—as heretics.

Occasionally some Protestant group rebelled or "protested" against the authenticity of the Bible's authority in some one particular respect. One notable example was that of the Universalists who discarded the doctrine of "Election" and "eternal torment," even though these doctrines are clearly taught by Jesus, according to the Gospel record, and advocated the theory of "universal salvation" or salvation for all as being more authentic or more in keeping with the doctrine that God was a God of Love, and could not therefore be conceived as eternally unforgiving or fiercely and ruthlessly punitive.

Another group which grew out of the Protestant tradition and whom we have mentioned before, the Unitarians, revolted first against the doctrine of the Trinity. Early Unitarians argued for one thing that the Trinitarian dogma had no authentic basis in Scripture, which indeed it has not, for as we have seen in an earlier chapter, the only passage in the Scriptures which affirms the doctrine of the Trinity (viz., 1 John 5: 7) is spurious, a forgery perpetrated by some over-zealous Fourth Century Christian theologian. The reader may be assured that this passage is now universally conceded to be a rank forgery, admitted to be such by even the most devout orthodox scholars, and its fraudulent nature is no longer open to question.

The early Unitarians contended too that the whole idea of a Trinity of Gods was incompatible not only with common sense, but was incompatible with the language of the Bible as well. They cited innumerable passages from the Bible where it was clearly stated or where it was as clearly implied that Jesus (who was pretended to be one member of the Three-Fold Godhead) was actually inferior to God in perfection, or inferior to God in power, or in still other respects.

If God was One, they contended, all parts of the Godhead would of necessity for example, be of equal perfection, power, etc. It could not logically be allowed, even for a moment, that imperfection could exist in any part of God's nature, and yet this is what the doctrine which included Jesus in the Trinity, necessarily implied. Furthermore, according to the gospel record, Jesus never claimed to be equal to God, except in the forged book of John, and even in this completely fraudulent gospel, the anonymous author who wrote clandestinely under the name of John, has Jesus declare:

> John 14: 28 My Father is GREATER than I. . . .

To be sure, a few chapters before, this Master Forger had declared—on his own authority—that Jesus was not only as great as God, but was in fact God Himself:

> John 1: 1 In the beginning was the Word (=Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word WAS God. . . .

This is the only possible sense of this passage in view of John 1: 14 where we are told that the Word (the Logos) was "made flesh" and dwelt among us. Also, in another place, the Master Forger of John, apparently hoping to thereby support his own statement has "Jesus," by subtle ventriloquism, confirm what the author himself had declared in John 1: 1:

> John 10: 30 I and the Father are ONE. . . .

But it is not Jesus speaking, but John, and not even John, but some nameless one, pretending to be John. But be that as it may, the statement that "My Father is greater than I" cannot be reconciled with the other statements which equate or identify Jesus with God. For that matter, how can any entity, God or man, be greater or lesser than itself? It is as though a man should say, "I am taller than me," which makes no sense unless "I" and "me" are different and separate entities.

To illustrate Jesus' own denial of divinity, we quote again from the book of Mark (the earliest gospel or biographical account of Jesus), where the following incident is reported:

> Mark 10: 17-18 And when Jesus was gone forth . . . there came one running . . . and asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. . . .

If language is intended to be understood, we can be certain that when Jesus is talking about God in this passage, he is not speaking of himself: his retort indicates clearly that he is speaking of another Entity than himself, and an Entity too whom he regarded as possessed of the attribute of goodness to a degree which he could not and would not claim for himself. Had Jesus been God or an equal partner in the Trinitarian Godhead, there would have been no need for him to question the man's use of the epithet "good" when applied to him, for Jesus plainly states that the epithet BELONGS TO GOD. If then he were God in very truth, the adjective, by Jesus' own acknowledgement, would belong to him too by "divine" right. The logic of this conclusion seems inescapable.

The dogma of the Trinity intimately involves also the doctrine that Jesus existed with God from the beginning of time: all three Parts or "Persons" of the Trinity presumably co-existed AS ONE from eternity, because God must be assumed to have existed from eternity. How then, the early Unitarians asked, can one be the Father and one the Son? For, to have this Father-Son relationship exist at all, one Person of the Trinity must have existed before the other.

Besides, if Jesus were "begotten," as it is stated in the "Apostles' creed," or was "created" by God in any sense, he could NOT have existed with God from eternity, as the theory of the Trinity demands (and as the anonymous author of John fraudulently claims: in the very beginning, he says, the Word—that is, Jesus—existed). Again, if God "begot" Jesus and "breathed forth" the so-called Third "Person" of the Trinity (viz., the Holy Ghost), God alone was the SOLE Creator of all, and God alone was God.

The early Unitarians argued that God was a unity (that is, ONE), not a trinity or group of three, however constituted; hence the name which distinguishes their denomination, viz., "Unitarian," in contrast to "Trinitarian." They simply could not believe that God could be, like Gaul, divided into three parts.

Parenthetically I might say here that never, even in the peak moments of Jesus' sincere and overpowering delusion that he was to be enthroned as the Messiah in the Kingdom of God, did he pretend that he had, or would have power equal to God's; for example, in the following passage, Jesus declares frankly that he does not have the power even to grant his disciples' simple wish, one to sit on his right hand, and one to sit on his left, in the "Kingdom":

> Mark 10: 37-40 They (James and John, the disciples) said unto Jesus, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand in thy glory. . . . And Jesus said unto

> them. . . . To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give. . . .

In short, the implication is plain that it is not within "his" power to grant them this boon, but within the province of a will greater than his. This is a definite admission that his own power is strictly limited, and subject to a greater power—that is, God's.

Even the Master Forger of the book of "John," momentarily forgetting himself, has Jesus make a puzzling declaration—puzzling in view of the author's former pronouncement that Jesus and the Father are ONE, for the pseudo John reports that Jesus said:

> John 14: 31 As the Father gave commandment, even so I do. . . .

Here the author of John reports that he, Jesus, conceives that he is executing not his own will, but the Father's "commands," an echo no doubt of similar passages in Mark, Matthew and Luke, where Jesus is quoted as saying:

> Mark 14: 36 Not what I will, but what THOU wilt. . . .
> Matthew 26: 42 THY will be done. . . .
> Luke 22: 42 Not my will, but THINE be done. . . .

The following passage in Mark will again illustrate that Jesus did not begin to pretend that his power was divine or equal IN ANY WAY to God's. Jesus is speaking, addressing God—certainly he is not talking to himself—addressing God in earnest and agonized prayer:

> Mark 14: 36 Take away this cup from me . . . for all things are possible unto THEE. . . .

Implying, of course, that all things are NOT possible to the speaker, Jesus. His, then, was not divine and unlimited power, but as he himself expressed it, the willing subservience of an inferior, and a finite human being, to the will of God, a will that was inscrutable even to Jesus. To God alone Jesus believed—and said—all things were possible.

As we have endeavored to demonstrate in earlier chapters, Jesus all along expected "Divine" help (which therefore he could not provide himself), to establish him as God's servant or Messiah in the earthly Kingdom of Heaven, a Kingdom which—as Jesus mistakenly thought—was to replace the worldly state of things WITHIN HIS OWN GENERATION. Of this mistaken expectation we have provided, in Chapter One, ample evidence and I think evidence that it would be difficult or unwise to deny, inasmuch as it is contained in Jesus' own words. In view of this expectation, we can perhaps better understand Jesus' bitter disappointment when (as he thought) God failed him in his "crucial" hour, and we can better appreciate his reflections in this dark hour, that brought from his lips the tortured and despairful words:

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me . . . ?

Whatever else these words of Jesus may or may not imply or demonstrate, they can scarcely leave any doubt that it was manifestly impossible for Jesus to have made such an outcry if he were indeed part of a Trinitarian Godhead, for God could not very well forsake Himself. The preposterousness of this must be clear to the most devout believer in Christian doctrine.

Let us now quote from the writings of one early Unitarian, Servetus by name, who was burned at the stake by his fellow-Protestants, the Calvinists, for daring to challenge, in those dark days, the doctrine of the Trinity:

> Three beings, three Gods, or one three-fold God, are foisted upon us under the pretense and with the names of a unity . . . three beings exist which they say are strictly, simply, truly and really so different or distinct that one is born of another and one is breathed out by the others, and all these three are shut up in one jar. . . . I am unwilling to misuse the word "Persons" and shall call them the first being, the second being, the third being; for in the Scriptures I find no other name for them. . . .

Commenting on Servetus' savage punishment by the Calvinists, or upon the punishment of so-called heretics in general, Castellio (1615-63) remarks, in his "Dedication to Duke Christolph of Wurtemberg":

> When I consider the life and teachings of Jesus who, though innocent, yet pardoned the guilty, and told us to pardon until seventy times seven, I DO NOT SEE HOW WE CAN RETAIN THE NAME OF CHRISTIAN IF WE DO NOT IMITATE HIS CLEMENCY AND MERCY (my caps). . . . Dost thou, O Jesus, now command that those who do not understand thy precepts as the mighty demand, be drown'd in water, cut with lashes to the entrails (this is not, let us note here, a report of Nazi or Communist brutality, but a reference to "Christian" action), sprinkled with salt, dismembered by the sword, and burned at a slow fire . . . ? Dost thou, O Jesus, approve of these things? If thou dost, what is left for the Devil . . . ?

And he adds:

> How can men dare attribute to Jesus that which they do by the instruction of Satan (or he might have said, "by their own instruction") . . . ?

Their denial of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity was but the first step taken by Unitarians to help emancipate religion from the tyranny, superstition, and dogmatism of the past. As the years and centuries wore on, later Unitarians, continuing in the tradition of their predecessors, challenged the authenticity of still other traditional doctrines of the authoritarian religions of the past, until now it is not just their disbelief in the Trinity alone which differentiates Unitarians in their beliefs from their fellow Protestants and Catholic Christians.

For in the meantime, Unitarians have successively rejected and abandoned as inauthentic other more basic Christian dogmas, such as the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Divinity of Jesus, the Divine Inspiration of the Bible, and so on. The rejection of such Christian doctrines is fully vindicated by the evidence presented in the pages of this book—evidence incidentally which I had gathered long before I became acquainted with Unitarianism.

Unitarians by and large now feel that the doctrines mentioned above, and other Christian dogmas, are not essential to what might be called basic Christian ethics or practice, nor essential to the development of religious character, or necessary, for the matter of that, to belief in God.

This Unitarian position is certainly amply sustained by the undeniable fact that there have always been millions of good and religious folk who did not believe specifically in the Christian dispensation or in the Christian doctrine as a whole, or in any part of its doctrinological aspects—for example, among the Mohammedans, Hebrews, Buddhists, etc., and among those who were just plain agnostics (who, as we have seen, reserve judgment in religious matters because the evidence for or against belief in God, etc., is—at least to them—neither affirmatively or negatively sufficient), and also among those who profess affiliation with no established religion but who nevertheless attempt to lead a moral, upright and humanitarian life.

The Unitarian Church, or better still the "liberal" religious spirit that finds expression through this church affiliation—or perhaps even better still, the characteristic "Unitarian" approach to religion—has come to be regarded in some neutral quarters as containing elements prophetic of or essential to the religion or Church "of the future." Whether or not Unitarians can fulfill this proud or roseate prediction will depend, I think, upon the courage and action of present-day Unitarians, and whether they can attract millions to join their ranks who either have no religious affiliation at present, or are dissatisfied with the intolerances of sectarianism, or the absurdities of dogmatic doctrinal Christianity, orthodox Judaism, and other dogma-bound religions.

Unitarians are notoriously small in number at the present time. Their number was even smaller when the American nation was founded. However, even so, one of the founding fathers, and a man who must (according to historians) be reckoned as one of the truly great amongst early Americans, and the Third President of the United States, viz., Thomas Jefferson, was apparently so favorably struck with the emancipated Unitarian outlook that he concluded that Unitarianism would—nay he thought it MUST—inevitably sweep the country and replace the dogmatic, tyrannical and sectarian religions of the intolerant and ignorant past, and achieve the same emancipation from tyranny in religion, as he and his compatriots had helped secure in the political life of America.

As a matter of fact, writing in 1822, Jefferson expressed the hope that all young men of America would be drawn or attracted to adopt the Unitarian faith:

> Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as pure as they came from his lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christian. I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its conscience to neither kings nor priests, the doctrine of ONE GOD is reviving and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian. . . .

And again, elsewhere:

> I confidently expect the present generation will see Unitarianism become the general religion of the United States. . . .

We might well inquire just what was the explanation for Jefferson's toweringly exuberant and enthusiastic hopes for Unitarianism (hopes which, like Jesus' expectation that the Kingdom of God would come in "his" generation, were to be disappointed). Perhaps the answer to such an inquiry can be found in Jefferson's own words, carved in marble on the lovely Memorial Building erected at Washington, D. C. by later and grateful generations, to Jefferson's memory:

> I have sworn, upon the altar of God, hostility against EVERY FORM OF TYRANNY over the mind of man. . . .

One form of tyranny over the mind of man which Jefferson apparently discerned, was the tyranny of dogmatic religion. As he evidently realized, Christianity had grown so doctrinaire and so dogmatic that the very ethics which Jesus had taught was in peril of being lost sight of in the impenetrable forest and tangled underbrush of theological theories, ecclesiastical practices and churchly ritual.

After all, in what does a man's religious character or ethical goodness reside? Does it reside in his openly avowed belief in strange doctrines and creeds handed down by ancient theologians, or does it reside in his practice of the virtues of good will, patience, proper humility, kindness, and the like? If your answer favors the latter alternative, you already have what might be called the Unitarian outlook; and if you customarily think and believe along these lines, you may very well be a full-fledged "Unitarian" without having known it.

To be a Unitarian does not require that you become a member of a new sect or denomination. It simply means that you personally embrace this broad and basic attitude as to what religion primarily consists of. When all is said and done, a man's religion does not, I submit, consist in his careful observance of the rituals of his Church, nor in acts of "formal" piety. Is not a man's religion, for example, more truly reflected in his constant and enthusiastic endeavors to be just, kind, and honorable?

It seems to me that such a question answers itself. Regardless of one's doctrinal beliefs or present church affiliations, one is left with little choice but to answer this question affirmatively. This of course is the way in which the question would be characteristically answered by the Unitarian. And I am certain that there are literally millions of others with this typically Unitarian outlook now harboring in other churches, who would answer in the same way.

Perhaps Jefferson saw that Unitarianism (comprising this basic Unitarian attitude toward religion), which was just a budding Church in the America of his day, was not just another sect or denomination like the hundreds of other sectarian or denominational Christian groups. Perhaps he perceived too, in Unitarianism's emancipated or liberal approach to religion, the seeds of the first truly NON-sectarian Church, where each man's opinion in religious matters would be democratically respected and where no attempt would be made to tyrannically impose any doctrine, dogma, creed, or religious "belief" on its members.

This is not to say that Unitarians then had or now have no religious beliefs. If the truth were known or properly assessed, they might be seen to have far more basic and much more demanding religious beliefs than those entertained by the general run of so-called "orthodox" believers who accept the complete Christian doctrine uncritically, without examination. Individually and as a group for example, Unitarians believe in a highly ethical or Christian way of life, as the term "Christian" is now popularly understood, when the term is divorced from the connotations and implications of belief in traditional Christian doctrinology and ritual.

Again, Unitarians—by and large—believe, as I do too, that religion is a way of life rather than a way or prescribed method of worship. The nature and strength of a person's faith is expressed not so much in the ritual he follows, nor in the creed he professes, nor yet in the fact that he observes the Sabbath (or a Sabbath) by attending "worship" services, but is evinced rather in the way of life he follows every day, day by day, and hour by hour. If the Unitarians could be said to have a creed at all—which they do not—this would come close to expressing it.

After all, is not your faith and my faith in God, or our faith in the validity of ethical values, more truly expressed in our attitudes and actions toward our fellow men and in our constant reflection upon and ardent appreciation of the bounties with which we are endowed by Nature and God, than in the rituals and forms of Churchianity? And THIS, in essence, is Unitarian "doctrine," if one might be permitted to so describe it.

Significantly, this doctrine is identical with the "doctrine" that Jesus himself taught. Jesus did not, for example, teach men to servilely observe the Sabbath. Instead he challenged the traditional "holy" attitude toward observance of the Sabbath when he declared:

> Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. . . .

In like manner, he challenged the practice of tithing, and—by analogy and specifically—other religious formalistic practices indulged in to the neglect of the MORE IMPORTANT matters of the moral law:

> Matthew 23: 23 Yes, ye pay your tithe of cummin, and mint, and anise, but ye neglect the weightier matters of the (moral or sacred) law. . . .

Again, Jesus did not go about teaching the doctrine of his virgin birth, nor the doctrine of his divine incarnation; instead he taught two principal precepts or commandments, viz., (1) to "love thy God with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," and (2) to "love thy neighbor (or fellow man) as thyself." He did not teach that one had to be baptized to be saved, but rather that salvation (or as he expressed it, attainment of the Kingdom of God) depended rather upon our conscientious observance of the two cardinal commandments enunciated above. He did not teach that he had "come" or been "sent" to atone for Adam's disobedience, but he did declare that his "mission," as he saw it, was to preach the Kingdom of God, to enter which one had to practice gentle kindness and good will rather than the falderol of "religious" ritual.

Unitarians—again by and large, for there is such a democratic divergence and variety of opinion amongst this group, that when one speaks for or about Unitarians, it must be understood at once that no spokesman can speak for all, but must express only his opinion and the opinion of such as follow his line of reasoning—Unitarians, I say, revere Jesus AS A MAN, and as a great or outstanding religious teacher, and follow (that is, accept as valid and attempt to fashion their lives to practice) such only of his ETHICAL teachings as appear to them to be sound, according to reason and the urgings of conscience, and such as are in harmony with their own concept of God's moral law.

But by the same token, Unitarians as surely feel free to reject such of Jesus' teachings as appear wrong or mistaken, or contrary to their concept of divine love, justice and mercy. Like the Universalists (who have since merged with the Unitarians) they too reject Jesus' teachings regarding the pre-determined "Election" by God of some chosen few to endless bliss, and the consignment of the rest—regardless of, or even because of merit or desert—to eternal torment.

They too simply cannot believe that a God of Love would prepare a place of everlasting punishment, as Jesus taught—if we can trust the gospels. Unitarians also, generally, reject Jesus' teaching "resist not evil," for many Unitarians, like members of other Christian and non-Christian groups, are active in combating diverse evils in the human community, locally and in the wider area of the world. They regard Jesus not as God or as the Son of God, but esteem him as a man, who like many another man, died leaving the world very much in his debt, and this despite the fact that he did not, to their way of thinking, possess a unique "divine" wisdom, and despite the corollary fact that he was clearly mistaken (like any other human being) in some phases of his thought and teachings.

Thomas Jefferson, that intellectual giant among men of the Revolutionary era, realized (as we have seen in our earlier quotation from his writings) that the teachings of Jesus "had not been preached always as pure as they came from his lips." Much that was extraneous to Jesus' teachings was added by his immediate followers and by the theologians of the early Christian centuries.

But as we have elsewhere intimated, some or many of these foreign additions to the simple ethics of Jesus were necessitated by the mistaken ideas which Jesus himself harbored in his mind, and which he expressed over and over again. One of these ideas, we will recall, was that the world would end in his own generation; another, that the Kingdom of God would be established immediately thereafter; still another, that he, Jesus, would serve as God's Messiah in this Kingdom; and yet another, that he would promptly return and come back upon "the clouds."

For many years I was convinced (as I afterward learned Jefferson had felt only a few generations ago) that I was a sect unto myself—as it were, a one-member "sect." In my earlier years it appeared that almost everyone around me—Catholic, Jew, and Protestant alike—accepted the Bible or portions of it, as God's Word in a very literal sense. It furthermore appeared that the two principal branches of Christian worship, Catholic and Protestant, accepted without question, and almost with unanimous agreement the traditional doctrines of Jesus' divinity, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, etc.

As outlined in Chapter Seven, I had myself been constrained as a matter of conscience to reject, on moral and psychological grounds —since the evidence in these pages was not then available to me—the doctrinaire Christian scheme of atonement and salvation as well as the Judeo-Christian (Jewish and Christian) insistence that the Bible was God's Word.

The superficial demands which dogmatic and traditional religion made upon individuals, to my way of thinking, did not reach to, nor even approach the heart of religion at all. Observing the Sabbath, attending church services, participating in the established ritual of a church, repeating a creed or prayers learned by rote: these, in my eyes, made the practice of religion—if this was all there was to religion—a matter of too facile and perfunctory accomplishment.

Religion to me seemed necessarily to consist of something other and something more than these outward flourishes of traditional piety, and yet I could see that many who paid careful homage to ritual and religious conventions, won and enjoyed sterling reputations for being religious. Apparently, so long as a man carried a Bible in his hand, come Sunday, or kept a Bible in plain view on his desk come Monday, little attention need be given to the greed and extortion he might carry in his mind and heart throughout the work-a-day week, and still less to the ill-will and cynicism he daily evinced or betrayed in his actions towards his less circumstantially fortunate fellow-men, of whose economic welfare, for example, the wheel of chance had made him temporary master.

Forgathering on Sunday in a house of worship would seem to me to have one main purpose—and but one—namely, to remind us that it is actually impossible to worship God in the very house of "worship" we ensconce ourselves in on the Sabbath—be it cathedral, church, or synagogue—and that if we would worship God at all, we must worship Him or emulate the high morality He symbolizes in the hourly conduct of our lives. Imitation of what we conceive to be the essential qualities of God's nature would be the highest worship of which any man is capable. Religion then is never just belief, but belief in action. Indeed, is not this the under-running theme of the Law and the Prophets?

How much or how strongly we believe in God or the moral law will shine forth more in the good cheer we promulgate, more in the good will we display toward our "neighbor" or fellow man, more too in the patience and tolerance we show, more in the kindness and warm humanity we radiate amongst those who share our times, than in stubborn or fanatic insistence on the correctness of some specific sectarian doctrinal beliefs, or participation in some churchly rite.

This is far from a new doctrine. This too was basically Jesus' doctrine, using the word "doctrine" in its older sense of "a teaching." It was old doctrine even before Jesus proclaimed it, for many other great religious leaders and teachers before Jesus' "advent" had taught the supremacy of the moral law and love. This too, simply stated, is Unitarian "doctrine."

One must grant of course that it would be far easier—far, far less trouble too—to leave the thinking in matters of religion to others and to merely accept on "blind" faith what others teach us. But this is a far cry from what even Jesus taught men to do. If we consider ourselves to be Christians (meaning "followers" of Jesus, or of his teachings in ANY sense), and if his example and doctrine mean anything at all to us, let me suggest that Jesus did not—for example, out of a mistaken reverence for Scripture—permit his critical faculty to sleep when he perused the Hebrew Bible scrolls, nor indeed should we.

Though today no one could very well question the essential "devoutness" of Jesus' character, Jesus in his day and age boldly and severely challenged and criticized the teachings or doctrines that he found in the Bible, and again and again suggested a new evaluation or re-statement of some ancient religious or moral teaching. His familiar formula was:

> Matthew 5: 21-22 (also Matthew 5: 38-39, etc.) It hath been said of old . . . but I say unto you. . . .

Few of us have caught up with the manifest implications of Jesus' spirited attack upon one of the very cornerstones of ALL established religion (the established religion of his day and no less the established religion of our day):

> Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. . . .

On the basis of such highly critical pronouncements, so-called "religious" men of his day (men who, like many today, were more concerned with the outer accoutrements and formal aspects of religion than with its inner spirit) flung at Jesus the harsh charge of blasphemy. Here then was a "devout" man (devout by our standards and by the verdict of history) being charged, ironically, with being just the reverse—a blasphemer and an atheist.

Let us particularly and emphatically note that Jesus did not declare that we should accept faith in God "blindly," or without the exercise of reason. Instead, as you will recall, he taught as the principal or very FIRST COMMANDMENT:

> Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy strength and . . . WITH ALL THY MIND. . . .

We are not to pull a shade down on the use of our mental faculties when we approach the worship of God. This is Jesus' specific instruction, and therefore it would seem to me that it should be a basic Christian precept, and a cardinal article of belief and practice among Christians. EVERY power of the mind, including its power to reason, and its capacity to weigh evidence, must be used. Jesus clearly sets forth that we should NOT swallow whole everything that is offered to us in the name of religion. We are charged to love (or intelligently worship) God, not only with all our heart and all our strength and all our soul, but also WITH ALL OUR MIND. We cannot do this by lulling half of our mind to sleep or by insisting that reason has no place in faith. Faith, on the contrary, MUST be founded as much on reason as on the imperative demands of that intuitive insight into the law of ethical right and wrong with which we are all happily endowed. To refuse to listen to the patient arguments of reason were as wrong, I believe, as to ignore the testimony of our heart and intuition.

When I first "discovered" the Unitarians—although like the Americas in 1492, they were there to be discovered all the time—I was immediately impressed by the fact that as a group they professed to use every avenue and every available means to further their search for religious truth. Their "faith," though it naturally differed from individual to individual was, I found, not entirely the product of cold and pitiless logic, of which they often stand accused, nor was theirs a religion of mere rejection (the rejection of orthodox doctrine), as it has so often been glibly misrepresented to be—by undoubtedly sincere but poorly informed evangelical Christian critics.

I was intrigued to learn that while Unitarians, like myself, do not blindly accept the authority of the past in erecting their faith, on the other hand neither do they blindly, or without careful appraisal, reject or exclude the study of the intuitive insights of men of other times. Nor do they reject, swoopstake, on a wholesale basis, the religious teachings of men of all other faiths, Christian, and non-Christian, Jewish, pagan, and profane.

In addition, I discovered that Unitarians seek God not only in the evidence of organized knowledge and in the amazing "revelations" of science, but in the compulsive promptings of intuition as well. Like Jesus, Unitarians lean heavily on the past for much of their own religious inspiration, but again like Jesus, they lean more heavily upon themselves, their own inner resources, and their own inward intuitive faculty.

When they do reject the religious authority of the past, the rejection is not based merely on the fact that the authority is old or ancient, but on the circumstance (where applicable) that it is patently untrue, improbable, or absurd; or again, where what the past teaches clearly jars with their own moral sense, or militates against the moral law as they conceive it.

In this respect too the Unitarians, it seems to me, more closely follow Jesus' example than the several hundred other so-called Christian orthodox evangelical sects do. In consequence, Unitarians might, if they were so inclined, or concerned themselves with such matters, claim—and not without right—the name of Christian (signifying a follower of Jesus, anciently called "the Christ"). They might in very truth claim the name "Christian" with more warrant and justification than many of the aforementioned self-styled Christian sects, who claim the name so jealously.

By the same kind of towering irony whereby Jesus, who is esteemed today of all men of his times, the man most devoutly dedicated to basic religious values, was accused of being irreligious and a blasphemer, the Unitarians today are often denied the very name of "Christian" by their fellow Christians, even though these Unitarians may indeed, as I have indicated, follow the spirit of Jesus' teaching more closely than those who claim the name Christian as their exclusive title with such avidity.

In his search for religious truth, Jesus was often compelled to reject traditional religious beliefs and traditional religious practices of the past, much as the Unitarians do today. Like the Unitarians of today too, Jesus emphasized the essential inwardness of religion, and severely criticized the formal and ritual aspects of the religion of his day when this formalism and ritualism came into conflict with the spirit of religion or frustrated the demands of the higher moral law as he conceived it.

As we have previously indicated, the formal and ritualistic observance of the Sabbath for example, was of less consequence in his eyes than the obligation to accomplish a good work on that day, even if the doing of the good or helpful act involved a formal violation of the Sabbath or the traditional "law" of the Sabbath.

Whatever in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures harmonized with his own inward religious sense and with his own common sense (for Jesus himself used logic and reason in his teachings and to refute his critics) Jesus adopted firmly as his own, and this is a basic method of selection and adoption amongst Unitarians. In this connection, we will recall that the commandments which Jesus reduced to two (to love thy God, and to love thy fellow man) were taken by Jesus bodily and word for word from different portions of the Old Testament.

The point I wish to make here is that these teachings were not new or original with Jesus, but that he adopted them AS HIS OWN because they were in tune with his own deep convictions. On the other hand, he as freely rejected other portions of the Old Testament teachings (like "an eye for an eye"), where these ancient bits of morality grated on his religious sense, or where they seemed to thwart the moral law. In these respects too, Unitarian practice is precisely the same as his.

Jesus had the courage of his convictions, and was willing to risk being called a blasphemer and a collaborator or colleague of Satan, rather than forego his open criticism of established religious beliefs and practices, or forego his criticism of Scripture where he was convinced in every fiber of his being that it was mistaken, or was actually immoral in its tendency, direction or influence.

The present-day Unitarian has to have the courage of his convictions too and, like Jesus, risks being called an unbeliever (or worse) by those of his fellow Christians who continue adamantly to insist that Jesus was God, or an Incarnation of God; that the Bible is in very fact God's authentic and "infallible" Word; that Jesus WAS born of a virgin; that Jesus' death was an act of divine "atonement" (atonement for our Original Sin, which we purportedly inherit from Adam); that, among other things, the "rituals" or sacraments of Baptism, and Communion (Eucharist) are "necessary" for salvation; etc.

The truth is that the Unitarian is apparently convinced that he must—as a matter of conscience—take the risk of being called an unbeliever, rather than take the GREATER risk of violating the integrity of his mind by pretending to believe something which every fiber of his being and every inward sense urges him MUST be wrong or mistaken. Unitarians often take this risk, I have observed, even when they lack palpable or tangible evidence—such as I have attempted to provide in this book—that would give substantial support to, or fortify their earnest and sincere convictions.

It is my opinion that if there is such a thing as sin in the sense of a wrong committed against God, the only "cardinal" sin is that of deliberately doing violence to that inner integrity of mind, to which I have referred in the paragraph above. This is the "portion" of each of us that is divine—if there is any portion of us that bears this quality —this the crystal pool or touchstone of divinity that resides within all of us, and makes us capable of comprehending moral issues and religious truth. When we muddy this pool, we taint this divine essence that makes us kin to God, which is at the very center and heart of our being.

Mildly sorrowful, sometimes, at being denied the name of "Christian," Unitarians may console themselves with the thought that, as the early Churchmen used to say, "Cucullus non fecit monachum" (the hood doesn't make the monk), and that it is not too important what tag or label any one of us may pin on ourself or deny to another. What is of importance is that we endeavor to practice or "live" the religion or beliefs we profess. Unfortunately, what passes for religion in the world is often masquerade, a Mardi Gras of gaud and show, and they who wear the masquerade are all too often, to use Jesus' own phrase, "whited sepulchers," whose outward gilding of white hides, if not the rottenness, at least the insincerity, narrowness and intolerance within.

Because they believe, like Jesus, that religion is "a way of life" rather than a "way of worship," Unitarians might easily contend that their attitude is more genuinely Christian (that is to say, more truly deriving from Jesus) than the attitude of Evangelical Churches, where the emphasis more follows form and ritual (involving "formal" acceptance and profession of specific creeds, doctrines and dogmas, and participation in various traditional rituals and sacraments), an emphasis which Jesus deprecated in favor of what he considered the more important aspects of the moral law.

Yes indeed, Jesus says, you faithfully pay your tithe, as tradition or the formal observance of prescribed religious duty requires, but (he goes on) you neglect what to me appear to be the "weightier" matters or aspects of God's law, namely the practice of love, mercy and justice. This in effect is what Jesus is reported to have said in Matthew 23: 23 and in Luke 11: 42. In both these passages Jesus seems to disparage the practice of tithing.

The reader who has taken the trouble to look up Matthew 23: 23 and Luke 11: 42, will promptly point out that in both verses, Jesus ALSO says:

> These ought ye to have done, and NOT LEAVE THE OTHER UNDONE. . . .

In other words, he seems by these words to nevertheless advocate tithing—providing the more important matters of God's law are not neglected or omitted. But Jesus did not ALSO say this at all. So "out of character" did these additional words seem to me that I set about to investigate the possibility that these words were not in fact spoken by Jesus at all. I had reflected, as it were intuitively, that the words above cited must have been interpolated or surreptitiously added to the text, because these words seemed to express a disharmony with Jesus' character as I had learned to conceive it, and furthermore, these words appeared to me to be strangely at odds with Jesus' attitude toward such "formalistic" aspects of religion. I had an uneasy feeling that Jesus could not—under any circumstances—have put his stamp of approval on tithing as a religious or moral "duty."

My intuition happily did not let me down, because I soon discovered that while these words appear in our present-day Bibles, they did not and do not appear in some of the most ancient copies of Luke and Matthew which are still extant—fortunately preserved extant from the inroads of time and man's deliberate destruction and mutilation. The words do NOT appear in the highly respected Codex Bezae Bible, nor Marcion's, and are therefore quite certainly a forged addition to the original text, forged by some early churchly Christian who perceived that to leave Jesus' deprecation of tithing as it stood originally, simply would not do, so he proceeded to put the "additional" words into Jesus' mouth, to make it appear that Jesus did not indeed actually disapprove or protest against tithing as a necessary "religious" duty, but that he just didn't want the performance of this duty to obscure the greater duties of love, justice and mercy. The truth is that Jesus, according to the way the gospel was written originally, made no such saving statement.

The tragedy is that such interpolations are permitted to remain in the Biblical text, even though Christian scholars now know or strongly suspect that they are forged additions and are not a genuine part of the original text. The instance we are discussing is but another example of the corruption or inauthenticity of the Biblical text, as it appears in our present-day Bibles. It also once more confirms our demonstration in a former chapter, wherein we illustrated the corruption of the Bible text by a number of more or less familiar, specific, and cogent examples.

The "Christianity" of the Evangelical Christian churches of today still carries much unnecessary doctrinal lumber inherited from the Church of Apostolic times, and the truth seems to be that these churches could discard every so-called "Christian" dogma, and still be not only Christian in their outlook, but more Christian than ever before.

Even the die-hards of sectarian intolerance and obdurate denominational prejudice would be hard put to deny this, for the word "Christianity," if it means anything at all, is a composite certainly—and basically—of faith in a moral God, or in the validity of ethical values, and high motivation; a combination of faith, and ethical practice in our dealings with our fellow men. In this stripped-to-the-bone definition, there is scant elbow room for doctrine, dogma or ritual. These latter are but accretions, barnacles that attach themselves to the rock of religion.

The color or coloration, so to speak, of a man's creed, like the color of his skin, is fundamentally not very important. It is the quality of his thought and action that definitively determine whether or not a man is Christian or all that the word "Christian" now broadly connotes, divorced of the word's doctrinal implications. If Christians and well-disposed men of every faith and every religion are ever to achieve "integration" and attain thereby effective power for good in the world, then the thousand and one dogmatic Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist sects must have the courage to discard their misinformed beliefs, and shed their ancient prejudices, which are based upon error, myth or superstition, and climb to a new plateau of human thought.

It is here that the Unitarian Church can be of inestimable service, because it has already somewhat cleared away the brambles from the path that could lead to such an integration and, as I envision it, become, instead of the Unitarian Church, a UNITE-tarian Church, unifying the divergent and "two and seventy" jarring sects and multitudinous denominations and faiths in one great democratic fellowship of worship where every man's opinion and intuition would be respected according to its reasonableness, probability, and good sense.

The only force that would be respected in this union of faiths would be the force of truth, and the bugaboos of intolerance, ignorance, prejudice, and fanaticism would—like old soldiers—fade away. One more tyranny over the mind of man would be vanquished and all the prophets and Jeffersons could rest quiescat.

The reason Communism has been able to assail established religion even to the degree that it has, is that established religion, in its dogmatic and doctrinal habiliments is SUSCEPTIBLE to assault. But give religion the armor of truth, emancipate it from the fetters of error and the hobbles of superstition, free it from dogmatism and intolerance, and no force and no ideology on earth could cope with it:

> Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just. . . .
> —*William Shakespeare.*

It would be foolish for even a Napoleon, whose name I use here as a symbol of military genius, to attempt to defend an untenable position. And this, in my opinion, is the situation in which the modern Church and Synagogue, hog-tied by tradition, find themselves. Rich in substance and property, often surfeited with material wealth, the things of this world, they are but poor, beggarly poor in moral or spiritual power. What power they possess is ineffective because they talk in an accent and language, speaking metaphorically, that the modern world cannot understand.

Albert Schweitzer has perhaps most graphically described the situation of Twentieth Century religion when he likened it to a sluggish trickle of water struggling along an all-but-dried-out river bed, which once was the channel of the powerful torrential flow of a mighty river. Religion was once a powerful force in world thought and in world history and, I submit, can become so again—if its forces can be unified.

If the Unitarians—and they alone at present, because of their emancipation from the tyranny and dead hand of the past, are equipped to lead the way—would seriously undertake to effect such a unification of the religious forces of the world, they must abandon for one thing the assumption or notion (which they and men of all faiths seem to jealously harbor) that each man has what might be called an "inalienable" right to absolute freedom of belief in religious matters.

I contend that this is only a half-truth, masquerading as one of those basic truths that seem self-evident to all. But because Unitarians regard this half-truth as expressive of an almost sacred right of each individual, they do not much bestir themselves to bring others, by earnest persuasion or patient demonstration, to their basically democratic and emancipated way of thinking in religious matters.

How strongly they are under the spell of this erroneous assumption is illustrated by the fact that they send out no missionaries to convert backward peoples to the Unitarian "faith." They do of course send out service teams or volunteer groups to help care for and teach backward and illiterate peoples, just as other Christian churches do, but these teams go out ONLY to serve and to teach, not to "convert" or gain proselytes as the others do in their missionary and evangelical zeal.

Like the Unitarians and others, I too believe in freedom of belief in religious matters, but it is my contention that this freedom of belief should be disciplined in much the same way as our freedom of action and our freedom of speech is necessarily disciplined. Even in a democracy, where each individual enjoys more freedom of action than under any other political system, this freedom does not mean absolute freedom to do just as we please; for we must, for example, respect the rights of others, and can neither appropriate to our own use the property of others, nor can we, in our pedestrian progress through the city streets, bowl people over like a half-back on a rampage, just because they happen to stand in our way, or like a Juggernaut run them down with our motor car.

Freedom of action, in a well-ordered society, must be a disciplined thing. When freedom of any kind walks undisciplined, then its name is no longer "freedom," but unbridled license. I suggest that it is discipline that gives freedom its essential quality and it is this quality that distinguishes it from lawless anarchy. One who shared our human predicament is reported to have said as she stood upon the gallows:

> O Freedom! how many crimes have been committed in thy name . . . !

Whilst this exclamation had evident reference to political liberty or freedom, the same might with equal or greater force be said of freedom of belief in religious matters.

If men wish to be granted absolute freedom to believe anything they please in religious matters, however absurd, improbable, or unreasonable—without subjecting this freedom of belief to the disciplines of common sense, reason, probability and common knowledge—it is not freedom they would enjoy but an anarchic license of belief; furthermore, they would no longer have a common ground upon which all minds might meet. For then we would have, so to speak, no common language: in our religious beliefs, if we disregard the basic grammar of probability or cast aside the cautious syntax of reason or—to extend the figure—abandon the punctuation of common sense, we cannot communicate with one another properly, if at all. It would be so much jibber-jabber and wild gesticulation.

And this is exactly what has happened in the history and development of religion. The world religions of the past and present have occupied themselves with building—together—a tower of Babel, each faith and each sect making its own rules of syntax and each refusing to submit itself to any grammatical discipline, if I may so express it, pursuing the metaphor employed above. The result has been, alas . . . Babel.

By their concerted undisciplined action, modern church groups are as surely undermining the foundations of the ivory tower of faith in God, decency and religious tolerance, as if they denied religious values entirely. It often falls out that the most pious do the devil's work best. It were as absurd for us to attempt to build a religious edifice, or any worthy human edifice without architectural discipline, as to build our beliefs without appropriate disciplines.

Fanatic, or near-fanatic insistence on absolute freedom of belief in religious matters has been, I believe, one of the serious obstacles not only to the more rapid growth of Unitarianism, but also to the growth of liberal religion in general. Religion, as I would define it, grows more "liberal"—and less dogmatic and more tolerant—in proportion as its spirit is emancipated or freed from the errors, fears, and superstitions of the past. "Liberal" religion is not liberal in the sense of being unwilling to submit to authority or discipline, but liberal in the sense of being emancipated from factors and forces that hamper its full flowering and perfect realization.

Unfortunately, even the Unitarians have been blinded by this half-truth that insists on absolute freedom of belief in religious matters for every individual. In fact, so anxious are the Unitarians to be granted the right to freely believe as their conscience dictates, that they are not only willing, but fall over themselves to grant the same right to others, even though on the one hand THEIR freedom of belief is voluntarily and carefully subjected to many disciplines, and on the other hand, the freedom of belief they would grant others is—more often than not—not required to be subjected to any discipline whatever.

I submit that our "freedom" of belief should be as carefully disciplined as any other freedom we enjoy. Our religious beliefs should for example be exposed to the piercing searchlights of reason and common sense. No one, I firmly contend, should be granted the right to "freely" believe anything that is manifestly unnatural, preposterous, or incredible. Religious beliefs should be measured against all available evidence, and should be correlated with the accumulated knowledge of our day and age. If the evidence or the findings or "revelations" of science (using the word "science" in the sense of organized knowledge) runs contrary to any so-called "religious" belief, this belief should be regarded at once with heavy suspicion, thoroughly investigated, and finally rejected outright if it cannot be reconciled with known facts.

Again, before any religious belief can be fairly accepted, it should be filtered through our inner sense of what is right and what is wrong. This inner sense of truth, or ethical intuition, like our esthetic sense, is one of our most valuable faculties or powers, and like reason, it should be used to sift and screen ideas contending for our tentative belief.

Liberal religion, far from throwing off all authority and running around free-footed, subjects itself instead to more authority and more rigid disciplines than ever traditional religions of the past did or do—the authority and disciplines of reason, logic, common sense, intuition and common knowledge—a bench of judges that it would be difficult indeed to easily over-reach, hoodwink or corrupt.

Free faith in fine must be disciplined no less than free action or free speech. If it is not so disciplined, it is not faith but pure fancy, imagination on the loose, just as when freedom of action runs riot or undisciplined, it becomes anarchic license, and involves the taking of undue liberties and arrant disregard for the rights of others. Likewise, when freedom of speech throws off the shackles of discipline, it becomes slander or low vulgarity.

It is my opinion that Unitarians should not only require a critical examination of their own religious beliefs, but should suggest the same thorough-going testing for the religious beliefs of others, and actively promote this disciplined approach to faith and religion. Their present retiring or negative attitude on freedom of belief often creates the impression that they concede that those who believe for example in angels and devils, or in a place of eternal torment, or in virgin births, and so on, HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO SO BELIEVE, and that faith justifies these beliefs, however undisciplined or uncritical that faith may be.

Discipline is the key to genuine freedom of religious belief, just as discipline is the key to any worthwhile human endeavor. Whether a man wishes to be a surgeon, a lawyer, a teacher, an orator, an architect, or a man in the fullest sense, his best, or perhaps his only method of attainment is discipline.

Let those of us who claim the name of Christian make a simple test of our own mental discipline or lack of mental discipline in matters of religious belief. Suppose, for argument's sake, that your neighbor's daughter came to your door this very hour and declared that an Angel had visited her months before and informed her that she would, in the course of events, bear a child begotten upon her by God or by a Ghost (called Holy), and declared further that she was fearful that her parents would not understand, now that her pregnancy was becoming apparent. Suppose too that she solemnly assured you that she had never been unchaste . . . would you believe her story? And if not, why not?

Many Christians, perhaps yourself included, believe or have at one time believed a very similar story told about Mary by the anonymous author of Matthew, and have been urged to accept this story as an article of religious faith. The testimony given by the book of Matthew is not even first-hand testimony such as your neighbor's daughter provides—it is hearsay evidence at best. Moreover, you at least know who your neighbor's daughter is, but neither you nor anyone else has any inkling who the author of Matthew was.

We know for a fact who he was NOT, viz., he was not Jesus' disciple, and we know further that he was not a contemporary of Jesus, as the evidence we have cited elsewhere from the gospel itself forcibly demonstrates. Should we then be willing to take the word of such an anonymous and uncontemporaneous witness, who relates things incredible and improbable?

But why basically would you or I refuse to accept the girl's story? Is it because it is improbable or absurd? But so is Matthew's story. Or is it because you or I as a reasoning person measure all events by the yardstick of probability and reasonable possibility? The girl is making up the story, you say to yourself, to avoid the shame of being considered guilty of unchasteness. What a wild and fantastic yarn, you think inwardly. How green of her to think you would be taken in by such an innocent yarn!

Never once, I venture, does it cross your mind that the tale could even be remotely true in any feature, except perhaps the fact of pregnancy, which she would hardly confess to, unless it were true or unless of course she were mentally disturbed, and was suffering from a delusion. But why, after all, do you think her tale could be anything but false? Certainly, if you believe that God did indeed beget Jesus upon a virgin, do you doubt His power to beget another child by the same procedure? And was not this begetting announced by an Angel too? These circumstances probably never enter your mind, because her whole story (you tell yourself) is too preposterous for serious belief.

Another thing, perhaps you frankly do not believe in angels, or again, perhaps you do. If you do believe in them, do you believe in them only on someone else's solemn assurance that they exist, or have you seen one? If you believe in angels on another's solemn assurance, why then do you not believe the girl's tale on HER solemn assurance? If it is wrong or inadvised to credit her assurance, is it not equally wrong or questionable to credit the assurance of the Greek or Syrophoenician or the Grecian Jew who wrote his tale about Mary some 2000 years ago and embodied it in the treatise we now call the Gospel of Matthew?

Perhaps you believe the Matthew tale because it is in print. But assuredly neither you nor I believe everything we see in print. Or perhaps you believe the story in Matthew because your spiritual pastor (whose knowledge of the matter is no greater than your own) assures you that it is true. But certainly, we do not believe everything other men assure us is true, however solemn their asseveration. Nor should we. For we cannot fail to remember with what solemnity Jesus assured his immediate or contemporary followers that the world would end, that the Kingdom of God would be established, and that he would return in the clouds, and furthermore, that ALL these events would occur WITHIN HIS OWN GENERATION:

> Matthew 24: 34-35 VERILY I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. . . .

Even Jesus' trebly solemn assurance did not bear sufficient power to bring the events he spoke of to fruition. Any man's mere assurance can be written on the wind or on fast-flowing water, for all the effect it has on establishing present facts or future events.

Evidence, and evidence alone, is pertinent, and if no evidence exists, the probabilities and our intuitions must be consulted. But certainly nothing should be accepted as evidential (i.e., pointing to a fact) or even as probable, when we consider matters that claim to be religious truth, on the mere say-so of ANY man whatever.

Yet this is precisely what all Christian denominations and sects, and all Hebrew denominations and sects ask their members to do. Because of the Unitarians' insistence on accepting only such truths as can be adequately supported by evidence, reason, or intuition, they are regarded by Evangelical Christian sects in a category by themselves; they are not considered "un-Christian," to be sure, but to state it more precisely, they are regarded as "non-Christian," which is quite another thing, although the two designations are unfortunately easily and often confused.

Even in the designation "non-Christian," the Unitarians are libelled to a degree, because Unitarians by and large believe strongly in what are generally described broadly as Christian ethics; they are non-Christian only to the extent of not believing in the doctrinological and ritualistic aspects of Christian "worship." Perhaps a more accurate designation for Unitarians would be non-evangelical Christians. But then, what's in a name?

Unitarians may sometimes lead exemplary Christian lives, and may be—by any standard whatever—"good" Christians, but because they cannot, as a matter of conscience, accept such traditional and evangelical doctrines as the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Bible's Inspiration, not to mention Jesus' teachings regarding the Elect and Eternal Damnation, etc., and because they cannot conscientiously believe in the intrinsic validity or effectiveness of such rituals as Baptism, Communion, and so on, they are often denied the name "Christian."

Unitarians believe that a man's religious character should be measured by his actions, and by the nature and elevation of his motives, rather than by what he openly professes, or the rituals or services he participates in. Accordingly, church attendance in the Unitarian Church is not a "religious" obligation, nor a hard and fast requirement for membership in the Church, but is altogether voluntary.

Like Jesus, Unitarians believe strongly that religious character is more clearly expressed in the patience, consideration, kindness, justice, and love we display toward our fellow man, and by a cheerful, thankful, humble, and tolerant mental attitude, than by an exemplary attendance at church services or by exemplary participation in church ritual.

> Matthew 23: 14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence, make long prayer. . . .

Here Jesus clearly teaches that a kindness shown toward the helpless or distressed, instead of taking selfish advantage of such helplessness or distress, would be by far a finer act of religious worship than lengthy prayers addressed to God. Not that prayer of itself is an ill thing (when we pray for strength, etc. rather than gifts), but the ESSENTIAL PART of religion is to be found largely in our dealings and relations with our fellow man.

There is nothing wrong either with a churchly rite as such, except that it is so often and so easily mistaken for an act of worship, WHICH IT IS NOT. The multiplicitous rites which are but "symbols" of worship are too often confounded with that for which these symbols stand; that is to say, the performance of ritual is often mistaken for the act of religion itself, whereas we may indeed "worship" more effectively in our livingroom or in our workshop than crouched before an altar.

Too many people think their obligation to God is paid when they have attended a church service, "taken" Communion (as the phrase is), or said a hurried prayer of thanks. These are but the "forms" of religion, its outward flourishes, not its substance or vital essence. Jesus' fundamental doctrine or teaching reverberates or echoes the teaching of many great religious teachers, like that of Confucius who apparently first formulated the "Golden Rule"—some 500 years before Jesus used it—and again, like the teaching of Buddha, who deplored and attacked ritualism in religion because he recognized its emptiness and perils, and like the teaching of all the other great religious "prophets" of the past and the nearer present.

What then polluted the great river of pure religion which these renowned teachers helped to swell? Mainly, I judge, it was the misapprehension by devoted followers of their teachers' basic teachings. To these followers religion was an outward thing, a compost of ritual and chanted prayer, to be celebrated before elaborate and candled altars, amidst mystic and censer-scented ceremonies—a gumbo of rigidly formulated doctrines, the very letter of which was sacred and had to be meticulously observed, together with prescribed acts of worship that presumably had some magical quality about them that would guarantee "salvation" to the worshipper, or win God's favor for those who performed them correctly, and threatened destruction or damnation to those who did not.

Jesus—to instance the matter further—rather than insisting on the merit of ritualistic and formalistic worship, actually decried and minimized it on every possible occasion. He called such outward signs of piety the "outside" of the cup, and the "outer" bleaching on the sepulcher that belied the corruption within. He considered too that punctilious observance of ritual was homage paid to the traditions of men, rather than homage paid to God's moral law. For example, when the Pharisees accused Jesus because his disciples transgressed the traditions or rituals that had been established by the elders, Jesus answered their criticism by pointing out that the very ritual, which the elders upheld, itself transgressed the greater moral law (which Jesus identified with the Word or Commandment of God):

> Matthew 15: 3 Why do YE then transgress the commandment of God by your tradition . . . ?
>
> Matthew 15: 6 YE have made the commandment of God of none effect by YOUR tradition. . . .
>
> Mark 7: 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, YE hold to the tradition of men, as (=for example), the (ritual of) washing of pots and cups; and many other such things ye do. . . .
>
> Mark 7: 13 Making the word of God of none effect through YOUR tradition. . . .
>
> Mark 7: 9 Full well YE reject the Commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. . . .

To show good will, compassion, etc. was, according to Jesus, to obey God's law, a position which Jesus made unmistakably clear in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-36). Even men whose lives are dedicated to God's service, like the priest in the parable who passed the fallen man by, are not obeying God's law, however faithful they may be to their priestly profession and however skilled they may be in the celebration of traditional religious ritual, and no matter how learned they may be in the knowledge of so-called "religious" doctrine.

Religion without the ingredient of good will, in the eyes of Jesus, was an impossibility, a contradiction of terms. Religion which lacks love or good will toward our fellows is, in short, not religion at all, even when it is lavishly garnished with ritual and larded with mystic sacrament, and crowded with open and fervent professions of belief in presumably "sacred" doctrines inherited from the past. Religion of this sort would be but lip or knee service to the FORMS of religion, not involvement BY THE HEART in the very substance or vital stuff of religion. These are Jesus' own words:

> Matthew 15: 6-8 Ye have made the Commandment of God of no effect by your tradition . . . ye hypocrites, well did the prophet Esaias (=Isaiah) say of you, This people draweth nigh unto God with their mouth, and honor God WITH THEIR LIPS; but their HEART is far from God. . . .

Many of us—by long habit—merely go through the motions of religion. We follow certain prescribed forms, observe the Sabbath by attending the church or synagogue of our choice, participate in the full ritual of the church we attend, contribute our tithe perhaps, and other such matters, then we go our ways thinking that our religious duty has been paid, our obligation to God met in full—whereas it is just begun when we step outside our church door.

This can be as true of Unitarians who pride themselves in their emancipation from the dead forms, empty rituals and meaningless doctrines of the past. For if they go to church merely, as the saying is, to stand up to be counted, or in mind to resolve their full religious duty by the simple act of attending a house of worship, and thus dutifully exposing themselves to inspiring sermons or taking part in stimulating discussions, and believe that their religious duties are accomplished thereby, they are as mistaken as their more orthodox fellows who put their faith in the creeds, forms and rituals which the Unitarians decry as being ineffectual or regard as completely unnecessary to the practice of religion.

The rites and forms of religion are dangerously deceptive, because —as I have indicated above—they lull their practitioners into a false sense of having paid their dues to God, whereas genuine worship must be achieved outside the church, in our daily living. We may rest assured that the only religious ritual which is "acceptable" in the sight of God is love, which—to be fruitful—must be expressed in action. Religion, if it is not a loving attitude toward God and man, is nothing.

Unitarians are at least awake to the perils of formalistic, ritualistic and doctrinaire religion, and they are often vehement in their rejection of so-called orthodox Christian practices and doctrines. But is the Unitarian religion, as many of its critics contend, merely a religion of rejection, merely offering a refuge for all who can no longer accept the teachings of the doctrinal and ritualistic religions of the past, or does it offer substantial and valid religious beliefs that one may build an earnest and vital faith upon?

Many Unitarians find it difficult to put into words precisely what it is they believe. But because it is difficult for them to frame their positive beliefs in words, does not mean that they do not have such positive beliefs, as I shall presently attempt to affirmatively demonstrate. They of course have no difficulty at all in expressing what they do NOT believe.

They do not believe, for example, that Jesus was God incarnate, or that he was the Second Person of a Trinity, or that he was God's "son" in a literal sense. They do not believe that the Bible is actually God's "revealed" Word, or that the writers of the books of the Bible were in any way "super-naturally" inspired. They do not believe that the story of Adam and Eve is historically authentic (that is, that the story is the narration of a true event), and therefore reject the doctrine of Original Sin, and the notion that man "fell" from a state of grace. They do not believe in Hell or a place of eternal punishment and torment. They do not believe in the "saving" efficacy of baptism, nor in the validity of Communion. They do not believe in the Virgin Birth.

One could go on endlessly to list what Unitarians do NOT believe. And as often as not, these Unitarians could offhand cite no corroborative evidence when they are asked to state why they do not believe in the Bible as God's Word, or in the Virgin Birth, etc. They might of course answer that it is absurd to believe such things, or that such things are highly improbable, or that such beliefs are contrary to common sense.

But such answers, without supporting evidence, would hardly serve to satisfy one whose belief in these things is, so to speak, solidly entrenched in the mind since early childhood. Only very specific and substantial evidence could possibly serve to even budge such belief. It is my hope that the pages of this book will make such evidence available and ready to hand not only to those who ask, but also to those who might be called upon to answer such questions.

But enough has been said of the "negative" religious beliefs of Unitarians. Before cataloging and discussing their positive religious beliefs, it might be well for us to briefly indicate what we mean by "religious" beliefs. I would suggest that a belief is religious if it is based largely on faith, rather than being capable of outward, palpable, or demonstrable proof.

In this sense, belief in the Bible (as God's Word) would indeed be a religious belief, but because there is overwhelming evidence that denies or contradicts God's authorship of the Bible, such a belief must be rejected as a mistaken religious belief. Even such beliefs as Unitarians now hold, either individually or as a group, they hold more or less tentatively, and stand ready to discard these beliefs (or any of them) if and when evidence is forthcoming which would mark such beliefs as absurd, unreasonable, or unworthy.

Before proceeding to list what I consider the positive religious beliefs of modern Unitarianism, I must again remind the reader that no one can speak for all Unitarians, nor indeed for any individual Unitarian, and there may well be some large differences of opinion as to the basic positive beliefs that I here shall attempt to enumerate. Unitarians are individually free to believe according to the dictates of their conscience, the conclusions of their reason, and the promptings of their intuition—taking all available evidence, probability, and common sense into due consideration; but by and large their beliefs on what we may term basic matters will often be found to roughly coincide:

ONE—Unitarians by and large do not believe that the Universe or Cosmos came about by mere chance, or by the blind operation of purely mechanistic forces. This belief involves for many Unitarians a positive and enthusiastic belief in God. The word "God" in this context may be defined in almost as many different ways, perhaps, as there are Unitarians. For some, God represents some Intelligent Power, vastly different from ourselves, but possessing an awareness of identity or consciousness—the quality, nature and extent of which we cannot even begin to fathom.

For others the word God may merely signify the Creative Principle or Creative Force in the Universe. There can be no doubt that, whatever else may be true or not true, the basic stuff of the Universe IS "creative." Whatever we call this "stuff," whether we use the term atoms, energy, or matter to describe it, we have positive, visible, and UNDENIABLE evidence of its creative power.

For example, even if—as atheists claim—this cosmic stuff may have existed of itself from eternity, they cannot deny its "capacity" to create. This mysterious, primordial stuff has for example created, besides the vast and orderly Cosmos, the whole complex of living things on earth, with their power to remember WITHOUT BEING TAUGHT (as in what we call "instinct," and in embryonic development) and with the power of attaining awareness of self, conscious memory, recall and reason (as in man).

Because belief in God's existence is not capable of absolute proof, it must be taken largely on faith, which qualifies it as a religious belief according to our definition. Orthodox, doctrinal and evangelical Christians and orthodox Jews of today believe in God too, but their God is the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, and the God of the Hebrew prophets—the jealous, sometimes savage or sadistic, sometimes scheming and duplicitous, often self-contradictory and ambiguous, and occasionally unjust El, Yahweh, or Jehovah of the Bible.

I hear a cry rising up in volume from the great body of orthodox Christians and orthodox Jews: We do not believe in SUCH a God! But a sober regard for truth compels me to answer: You do believe in precisely such a God as long as you insist on believing that the Bible is God's Word, or that God inspired the Bible as a "guidebook" for our salvation. I believe personally that whatever God may be, He is a loving and an equitable God, a God of infinite understanding, and moral justice as well. The God of the Bible falls so far short of my blazing conception of what God must be that I am appalled and revolted at the picture of the Deity which the Scriptures portray and imply. The portrait of Dorian Gray could hardly be more appalling.

It is true that some of the later prophets and notably Jesus conceived God—at least sometimes—to be a loving, compassionate, and merciful God, but God's reported actions in the Bible frequently fail to measure up to this sublime and loving conception. Besides, when Jesus teaches (as he does) that God has prepared a place of quenchless fires and "eternal" punishments, or that God proposes to "save" only those whom He had chosen from the foundation of the world, even Jesus' conception of God seems inadequate. My very soul cries out that this is not the way of the just and moral God I envision at the heart of the Universe.

The Unitarian belief in God is generally a reasoned belief, a belief based not on the doubtful and contradictory testimony of the Bible, but on evidence that is uniformly visible to us on every hand—and visible too to all generations alike—not based on revelations presumably granted to only a few ancient generations of men (whose accuracy and credibility we are apparently free to challenge in all matters except the most important matter of religion).

The incredible creative force within matter, already mentioned, is sufficient to indicate with what consummate skill matter is constructed and constituted. It is so beautifully and so skillfully conceived and engineered—down to the most minute details—that for many it appears to be WITHOUT QUESTION the result of careful and astute planning. And where a plan or purpose is revealed, a conscious Planner seems to be indicated or may be plausibly pre-supposed.

We cannot know for sure of course, so that those Unitarians who believe in God, must—like other believers—believe on faith, although it is a faith that may be bolstered or supported by what appears to be overwhelming evidence for those who can detect a purposefulness in nature. If this is a delusion, it almost seems that unconscious matter itself must be capable of purpose, purposeful behavior, or purposeful and "intelligent" cooperation. Incidentally, in my opinion it was not so much "competition" as cooperation that made evolution possible. But why should mechanistic molecules have cooperated to create ever more highly developed forms, unless some force within them gave them a nudge in this direction? Evolution is just another word in our lexicon and vocabulary, but what it stands for and what it signifies in all its implications provides, it seems to me, one of the STRONGEST proofs of God's existence.

TWO—Many Unitarians believe in personal immortality, in the survival of individual personality beyond death. Those Unitarians who hesitate to believe in such personal immortality content themselves with the thought that they live on either in their offspring, or in the ever-widening circle of the influence that their endeavors, however humble, may have had to make the world a happier place to live in.

Those who believe in "personal" immortality build their belief on faith, believing that a God, or for that matter, a Universe that has provided so carefully and with such conscious (or mechanical) wisdom for the creation of human personality, would not reverse His (or its) purposeful action and contrarily or perversely snuff it out. It would seem too that only by making provision for the survival of individual personality would it be at all possible for our personality to fully mature and fulfill the aspirations of our inmost being.

If no survival after death is indicated, why do we intuitively feel "intimations of immortality," why does the inmost fiber of our being respond so readily and so strongly to the hope of personal immortality for loved ones who have gone before? We stare, unbelieving, at the blank prospect of complete and timeless annihilation for these loved ones—or for ourselves, when the heavy marble door of death shall have closed upon our brief human career. If God exists—as we believe—He would do us great wrong to awaken us to such present powers as we possess and to immortal aspirings, only to blot us out without ruth or pity, like the grim Over-Lieutenant of a Nazi Concentration Camp. It would be twelve ways incredible to believe that this could be the deliberate act of a God of Love and Mercy.

In addition, so magical is the world, so bewildering the Universe, and so full of strange, incomprehensible, and undreamed-of possibilities—consider, for example, our inability to conceive or imagine an infinity of Space, space without end or beginning which apparently nevertheless exists, and the utter impossibility (again apparently) of an eternity of time WITHOUT A BEGINNING, not to mention the inconceivable happenstance that matter (whether purposeful or mechanistic) should exist on its own without some Designing Hand, and even the mystery of God's own self-being or self-creation—that circumstances might be said to conspire to give us confidence that personal immortality is easily within possibility, however appearances may often be set against it.

Belief in immortality—where it exists among Unitarians—is a religious belief because it too is based, not on demonstrable proof, but on faith. Actually, orthodox belief in immortality would not seem to require the exercise of as much faith as the Unitarian belief, because for the orthodox, it is based on the presumed implications of a presumably authentic revelation received presumably from God by older generations of men; or as an alternative presumption, from His presumed agents, and transmitted down the centuries with a large presumption of accuracy.

As I have shown, we need not abandon belief in personal immortality even though we abandon all the large presumptions we must mentally embrace before we can accept the traditional or orthodox belief; on the other hand, a greater faith in God will be required of us in the process. Not only in respect to this belief, but in many other respects, a LARGER faith will be needed if we would face the facts of life squarely and with complete honesty, and this is the real challenge. Are men capable of a larger faith than that demanded of them by traditional Christianity or traditional religion?

THREE—Unitarians, unlike their orthodox and doctrinaire brethren believe, as I believe also, that man has "risen" rather than "fallen." He did not fall from a state of grace and perfection such as is often pretended (this pretension being based, for the Christian, on the Eden MYTH), but rather he has risen, on a slowly upward-inclining curve from a half-brutish morality to an ever-ascending conception of moral right and moral justice.

Historically, in the annals of man, the curve may have dipped backward on occasion, but each new rise of the curve mounts someways beyond the last plateau reached, and most Unitarians have an unfaltering faith in man's continued homage to the moral law and a steadfast faith that man will continue to climb the ethical ladder to ever newer heights. The notion that man is born "depraved" or that he possesses a "sinful" nature from the mere fact of his human condition—or, as many evangelical sects insist, is "conceived in sin"—is rejected by Unitarians as unrealistic. Besides their deep faith in God's goodness, they have as well an abiding faith in man, and in man's basic goodness.

The built-in directional needle or pull in "mechanistic" matter not only points matter to more intelligent and more cooperative organization, but ever points matter toward the Pole-Star of greater moral perfection. Man's growth in moral stature in the past 5000 years is a case in point. As we are aware, as matter evolved into more highly organized kinds or species of living things, the "moral" ingredient inevitably came more and more to the fore and became more pronounced until it evinced itself conspicuously in man. The fact that man's moral nature is subject to diversion or degradation, does not detract from man's basic homage to the moral law.

When man's moral nature is degraded, it is usually because of ignorance or due to a mistaken attitude toward reality, resulting for example in an inordinate greed for wealth or power. Domination of our fellows is a vain, illusory ambition because by the nature of things such domination cannot be permanent, individual life being of so brief a term. Domination of material possessions also finds quick surcease, for on earth we own nothing in fee: we are custodians only, and custodians all, and the leaseholds we have on our possessions, no less than on our bodies, are of extremely short duration.

FOUR—Unitarians characteristically believe in the validity of reason, the rational process, and logic, although they may be hard put to put such a belief into words. The question is, can we humans trust the conclusions we arrive at through reasoning? My answer is yes, even though certain aspects of the Universe may seem to defy analysis by human reason and logic, so that a measure of faith IS required to sustain this belief in the validity of the rational process, and the conclusions reached when this process is used in our search for truth.

For example, there is nothing logical or reasonable about time. We cannot, for instance, reason out in our minds (so that we can comprehend it) the beginning of eternity, because we cannot conceive that eternity could have had a beginning, nor on the other hand can we conceive that eternity could have begun without there having been a point of time when it had a beginning. Here logic and reason fail us completely. Time apparently is not to be comprehended by our logic, but may be subject to what one might term "chrono-logic," a word coined here to denote the logic of time ("chronos" being the Greek word for "time").

Shakespeare almost certainly recognized the basic difference between logic and what I have called "chrono-logic," when in the play "Hamlet" he has Polonius (depicted as a rather shallow, but worldly-wise person) declare, after offering his departing son precepts to guide his conduct in foreign parts:

> . . . This above all: to thine own self be true
> And it must FOLLOW, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man. . . .
> —*Act I, Scene* 3, *lines* 78-80.

Because Shakespeare is bent on portraying Polonius as somewhat of a intellectually superficial character, he must be made to speak the language of shallow superficiality, just as when Shakespeare has a soldier speak, he must be made to speak—for the sake of verisimilitude—the language of men engaged in war, as witness an earlier occasion in the play, when the soldier-sentinel speaks to Horatio:

> . . . Sit you down awhile;
> And let us once again ASSAIL your ears,
> That are so FORTIFIED against our story
> What we two nights have seen. . . .
> —*Act I, Scene* 1, *lines* 30-33.

A soldier, like the lawyer or any other professional man, naturally uses the terms and vocabulary of his trade, no less than its tools. Now Polonius, being cast as a man whose thought is superficial and shallow, Shakespeare accordingly has him betray a lack of mental depth by having him confuse in his very speech what is chronological for what is logical. "It must follow," Polonius says, "as the night the day." But night does not follow day "logically," as Polonius intimates, but chronologically—which is quite another thing. The great and profound artistry or art of Shakespeare is revealed again and again in the most subtle ways, and it is this that has made him the glory—or despair—of his fellow literary craftsmen.

Conceivably, chrono-logic may not be subject to the same laws as logic. In a related way, who could "deduce" by pure reason the succession of the seasons? Incidentally, even in the revolving seasons is the astute engineering (mentioned above as evidence of God's existence) revealed, for the earth in its ride about the sun is tilted at a 23-degree angle, and were it not so tilted, scientists tell us, there would be no seasons, and vapors would move north and south and pile up vast continents of ice.

By analogy (if our premises and reasoning therefrom are correct), we might conclude that Space may have a logic of its own too, differing in kind from chrono-logic and from the logic of human reason, which cannot of course comprehend or rationally deduce the mystery of space. For how can the brain possibly reason upon "infinite" space—space that is, that stretches without an end and without a beginning? Truly, but truly

> . . . there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. . . .

If the conclusions of logic and the reasoning process can be trusted, as I believe, there is no reason why logic and reason should not be employed in the study of religion, as in all other departments of life. For those who would hesitate on this point, and shy away from the use of reason like a skittish mare, let us again recall Jesus' own primary commandment:

> Mark 12: 30 Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, AND WITH ALL THY MIND . . . this is the FIRST (=principal or primary) commandment. . . .

FIVE—Perhaps one of the most significant religious beliefs of Unitarians (and of course, of others too) is the firm belief in the existence or validity of moral or ethical values. Moral values can be "read into" many sorts and sets of circumstances where man is an actor, or is someway involved.

We discern such moral values when they are present without knowing just how we discern them. Perhaps it is a deep-seated seventh "sense" of right and wrong implanted by Nature or God, which enables us to detect the quality of moral rightness or moral wrongness in a given situation. Similarly, our so-called esthetic "sense" enables us to appreciate beauty, whether in nature or in art, and whether of form or color, line or general impression, sometimes without our being exactly aware (or at least without our being able to completely analyze) what the precise elements are that provoke our esthetic response.

Just as the organ we see with is sensitive to light, and just as our hand possesses a sensitivity to touch or contact, so some inner faculty, or (to speak in metaphor) some fiber, chord or organ within us may be quite as sensitive to beauty, and another as responsive to moral truth or the moral law. Long ago, man gave the inner organ or "sense" of moral values a name, answering to the English word "conscience." So urgent are the promptings of this organ that to some it seems to have a voice of its own, which stays our hand when we would do a fellow-human wrong or which chides us with remorse after wrong-doing.

Quite obviously we cannot isolate a moral value or an ethical quality in a test-tube, and we can neither measure its force mechanically or weigh its substance in a scale; but neither can we, it seems to me, wholly disregard the promptings of our intuition in the matter. Certainly a measure of religious faith is required to believe in the existence, validity, and importance of such moral values. For, for aught we know for certain, the Universe may be "a-moral," or morally neutral, blithely careless of right or wrong.

We daily trust in our sense of right and wrong, without realizing that it is "trust" or faith—belief in its reliability. Sometimes the "message" it gives us or flashes is only a vague and indefinable, queasy feeling of wrong, like the sounding of a faint and distant alarm, but it is enough. Of all built-in instincts or faculties, this is likely the most subtle and elusive.

Those who believe strongly in moral values prefer to lead lives of relative integrity, sincerity and honor, rather than lives of skulking, duplicity, and grovelling meanness. And those who believe that moral values are valid and attempt to follow what appears to them to be the "nobler" course in their lives, do so, be assured, not because of any expectation of heavenly or other reward, nor yet because of craven fear (for example, the fear of eternal punishments). They would still eschew what seemed unworthy and unbecoming, I dare say, even though there were proof positive that God did not in fact exist, and even though it had been established with certain certainty that personal survival beyond death was a mirage, a will-o-the-wisp, and a hope forlorn.

Unitarians by and large believe in the supremacy of the moral law, just as Jesus believed in its supremacy. Like Jesus too Unitarians strongly deprecate the emphasis put upon ritualism, formalism, dogmas, creeds and the like in "religious" practice. Like him, they believe the emphasis in religion should be put on observance of the promptings or, if you will, the demands of the moral law—the law which declares for example that one act of thorough-going good will toward a fellow human being is more esteemed or estimable in the sight of God than the celebration of, or participation in a dozen or even an hundred prescribed "rites," sacramental rituals, or formal prayers.

Going through the prescribed motions of what the world considers "religion," like observing the Sabbath and attending Church, "reading" the Bible, etc., is an empty procedure at best, if we do not display—in our daily life—the virtues of love, tolerance, good will, humbleness, and honor. Of what value are hour-long prayers if at their conclusion, so filled are we with self-righteousness, that we do not contain ourselves in patience at a fellow-being's human failing or a childhood blunder?

Our belief in morality or our worship of God is barren and fruitless if we do not follow in our lives the ethical law stamped upon our hearts—which is another way of saying that religion (according as Jesus taught) is a way of living rather than a way or method of worship.

Each of the thousand sects—Christian and non-Christian alike—insists that its way of worship is the correct or "true" one. They are of course mistaken. I submit that there is but one way and one way only to worship God, and that one way is by the practice of good will and love in its broadest sense.

SIX—As a corollary to their belief in the validity and supremacy of moral values, the Unitarians may be said to believe most strongly in the practice of love, kindliness, and good will toward their fellow human beings. They believe in maintaining, as far as is humanly possible, a loving and a kindly attitude toward all, an attitude that will inevitably express itself not only in courtesy, in kindness, in broad tolerance, and in a rational treatment of their fellows, but which will evince itself also in humanitarian service and dedication to movements and causes that will help to better the condition of those among us who are distressed and underprivileged, or who suffer from the constricting bonds of ignorance.

I have called this belief in the power of "loving-kindness" a corollary to the basic belief in moral values because it seems to me that it is a self-evident or intuitive truth that it is a positive wrong or an immoral act to be unkind, unjust, impatient, cruel, intolerant, uncharitable, or cheerless in our relations with other human beings. This "self-evident" truth, like other intuitive truths, cannot be demonstrated mathematically, but every fiber of our being, and every impulse of our intuition proclaims its truth, its soundness and its validity. Here, as elsewhere, deep religious faith is called upon to make up the deficit which cannot be supplied by open, tangible and demonstrable proof.

The power of love is easily demonstrated, for kindness shown will in most instances beget further kindness, and love love. Perhaps Jesus too, observing how readily we respond to the love or kindness of others, reached the conclusion that if instead of regarding and using our "enemies" with despite (that is to say, hatefully), we showed them unusual kindness, they in turn would inevitably show kindness in return. This was surely a novel method of overcoming ill will, but it can succeed but hardly where the so-styled "enemy" does not believe or refuses to believe that moral values like honor and integrity are at all valid, or where in short there is no faith in the existence of a moral law, paralleling or complementing the physical laws of the Universe.

To further illustrate the power of "love" or loving-kindness, even when it is originally based only in pretense, one might cite an experience that I am sure is common to most of us. Certainly many of us have observed how we strive with might and main to live up to and emulate the high opinion others entertain of us, even when we know or feel in our hearts that their opinion of us is largely without foundation, or that it is entirely undeserved or we quite unworthy of it.

Nevertheless, by following the counsel of Shakespeare, viz., to "assume a virtue if you have it not," we often find that by such a method and continued pretense, the "practice" of the virtue of kindness or patience or good cheer, for instance, will teach us to be kind, patient or cheerful—and lo! the virtue which we lacked, we lack no more. Have we not indeed all responded at one time or another to such a process of growth?

SEVEN—It goes without saying that Unitarians must almost certainly believe in the power of faith, not of course in the old sense of being able to produce supernatural miracles thereby, as if by magic or in contravention of natural law, but in the sense that with faith in our inner resources, there is little we cannot achieve within the framework of the natural laws that God has ordained or Nature provided.

Faith seems to be the fuel wherewith our best enthusiasms are fired or powered. It was Emerson, whose powerful and prophetic beacon shines still from out of the Nineteenth into our Twentieth Century, who said "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm," and enthusiasm is almost impossible without a full and abiding faith in the object of that enthusiasm.

The Unitarians have no creed as such, but if one were to attempt to frame a creed for them, it might be Emerson's manifest creed of "Self-Reliance," expressed succinctly in the phrase "Trust thyself." In short, have faith in the divine or creative power within yourself, the power to yourself judge what is ethically right without having to rely on the judgments of others or on the judgments of the past.

We all have the same "divine" wisdom within us as the tallest prophet of ancient Israel had, and the same inner pool of inspiration as any. And we need not wait for some Angel sent from Heaven to stir this pool, but can look into it ourselves and see reflected therein the wisdom and beauty of God.

From the Unitarian religious beliefs briefly touched upon above, it should be clear to any reader that the Unitarian outlook is NOT a religion of rejection solely or even chiefly, as has often been mistakenly thought or claimed by sincere but uninformed "evangelical" Christian critics, but it is rather a religion of definite, forthright, positive and universal beliefs.

The Unitarian approach to religion may be said to even require, if anything, a greater faith on the part of its adherents than that required by the so-called "orthodox" or traditional doctrinaire outlook. The Unitarian faith is certainly more demanding and subject to severer disciplines. It can not, for example, be accepted blindly or unthinkingly. If one would worship the Unitarian way, he must worship—as Jesus suggested—WITH ALL HIS MIND, as well as with all his heart, soul, and strength.

Dissatisfaction with the narrowness, absurdity, intolerance, and sometimes the arrogance of traditional religion, is of course a part of the Unitarian outlook, but this dissatisfaction is not the ALL of Unitarianism. Rather this dissatisfaction is the flowering out of deep-down religious beliefs, beliefs which run head-on and collide resoundingly with the absurd rituals, intolerant doctrines, and iron-collared dogmas of traditional orthodox Christianity, traditional orthodox Judaism, and other hidebound religious orthodoxies.

There are those who cannot in good conscience live by one set of values six days a week and another set of values on Sunday. The tests we apply to work-a-day affairs to determine their probable truth, morality and good sense, Unitarians by and large are convinced we should apply equally to religious matters and to the worship of God. To them this is a matter of conscience, for they feel that a person cannot LIVE by one set of values and WORSHIP by an entirely different set of values, without taking the taint of hypocrisy.

The movement of religious "protest," known historically as the Protestant movement, which started several centuries ago, and affected all Christendom, stemmed from a vigorous protest against certain rigorous dogmas, rituals, and claims of the early Catholic (=universal) Church. This movement of protest cleared the religious atmosphere of some few absurdities and some strange doctrines and rituals in Christian worship. However, many more absurdities, strange doctrines, and stranger rituals still remain in Christian worship, none of which, as we have seen, are in any way relevant to the ethical teachings of Jesus.

One might suggest that a second movement of religious protest, a new Twentieth Century religious reformation, a second "Protest-ant" movement might be the prime need of our day, to finally sweep away the doctrinological and ritualistic remnants and dead lumber of the ignorant and superstitious past.

In the "Church of the Future," all men of good will, formerly separated by barbed sectarian fences, shall sit in worship side by side: Moslem, Jew, Christian, and Buddhist alike. But only on the basis of some such broad and universal religious beliefs as I have outlined above, and which I have attributed (and I hope not unjustly) to the

Unitarian outlook—beliefs so universal that they can command conscientious acceptance by men of all shades and degrees of religious faith—only so, I repeat, can this envisioned unification of all men of "good will" be achieved.

A quiet start in this direction has been in the making for several centuries now within the Unitarian Church, although it must be at once made clear that unification of all faiths or even of all Christendom has neither been the conscious aim or the announced or pretended purpose of the Unitarians. This aim is one that I myself have suggested elsewhere in this chapter because this organized group—and to my knowledge this church group alone—already accepts the necessary premises which could lead to such unification.

The Unitarian Church has until now served for the most part as a refuge or religious home for those whose conscientious religious beliefs have made it impossible for them to accept the doctrinal and ritual absurdities and sectarian intolerances of doctrinaire Christianity, orthodox Judaism, traditional Buddhism, etc.

Because of the broad basis of its religious beliefs, one may find in a typical Unitarian congregation, a former Catholic priest sitting beside an attorney reared in the Hebrew culture, and nearby a group of former Buddhists sitting next to former Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, etc., and all sitting alongside men trained in the sciences (Doctors of Medicine, physicists, naturalists, etc.) who, contrary to the common belief about pure "scientists" generally have deep religious convictions, convictions which are sometimes far deeper than those of persons not trained in medicine and science, because their knowledge of the world about us is more intimate, and they discern therefore competent evidence against the assumption that either the Cosmos or life is a mechanistic accident—for the more deeply Science probes, the more evidence it finds of apparent purpose, astute engineering, and what appears to be intelligent foresight.

Here then in this typical Unitarian gathering—which is not at all a product of fancy, but is taken from life—here, I say, is seen in miniature the Church of the Future, if we had the trick to see it. In this same Unitarian congregation, one might find as well a fair number of agnostics, of whom we spoke earlier, who do not actively deny God's existence, but who conscientiously withhold belief one way or the other because they do not feel that they—or anyone—can, in good or perfect conscience, harbor or express the firm conviction that "God" exists without more conclusive or decisive proof. Such agnostics nevertheless entertain most of the other religious beliefs I have catalogued in this chapter, including often a strong hope that a God exists; and such agnostics believe enthusiastically in moral values, which prompts them to endeavor to lead lives of relatively high integrity, decency, honor, dedication, and service.

As pointed out earlier in this chapter the evidence, which you or I might consider conclusive or virtually so, or at least so strong circumstantially as to preclude any smidgeon of residual doubt the agnostic views as possibly delusive or equally subject to other interpretations. Therefore, as he sees it, it would be illogical, if not morally wrong or unconscionable to accept such evidence as outright proof of God's existence—without further substantiation. It is most certain that not one of us in the human predicament has POSITIVE knowledge of the fact of God, but what we have at most is what amounts to a towering faith in God's existence, based on the possibly fallible conclusions of reason and upon the possibly deceptive urgings of intuition.

The orthodox Judeo-Christian belief in God is founded on faith in the Bible's authentic inspiration, and for the orthodox Christian, this faith is further "confirmed" in the story of the star of Bethlehem. In this story, according to the orthodox Christian view, abide the highest hopes and aspirations of every member of the human race. And if the tale were true in all of its manifold implications, our dearest hopes would certainly find fulfillment, because involved in the story of the infant over whom the star is alleged to have "stood," is the purportedly inspired revelation that God exists AND—as the gospel unfolds—supposedly authentic information regarding personal immortality.

Instead of having to rely on faith, if the gospel story were historically accurate in every detail, and verifiable, we would have CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE that God exists, and more importantly, the knowledge that He has prepared a mansion of immortality for each of us. The reader will recall Jesus' comforting words that "in my Father's house are many mansions" (which is to say, room for all), but alas!—we cannot erase from memory the equally despairing words also spoken by Jesus, and reported by Mark, which the reader must, in fairness to himself, ponder too:

> Mark 15: 34 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me . . . ?

The cross often regarded as a symbol of firm faith, even in the face of death, is here discovered to be a symbol of faltering faith.

Perhaps—nay, for a certainty—Jesus' declaration (if it is his) that "in my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14: 2) was only the hope voiced by a deep and abiding human FAITH, and was not based on certain and divine knowledge. We are further cast down into the abyss of despair when we realize that the comforting words about these "mansions" or places of rest which we are assured (ostensibly by Jesus) are prepared for us, occur in the FORGED book of "John," written in the Second Century A.D. long after the death of Jesus, and written too by an ANONYMOUS Christian writer who dishonestly pretends—or who is dishonestly pretended—to be John the Apostle, the pretension being made probably to win credence for his words; or written by someone who deliberately hides his true identity in puzzling ambiguity for fear perhaps (or apparently) of having his words completely discredited, should his name have been disclosed.

We know now that the author of John was neither a contemporary of Jesus nor his disciple, and the words which this pseudo John reports that Jesus spoke are almost certainly counterfeit or forged, as we have attempted to demonstrate at large in Chapter Six. Forged too, beyond any question of doubt, are the beautiful words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," which we find in Luke 23: 24, words which were put into the dying Jesus' mouth TO TAKE THE PLACE OF Mark's despairful "dying" words ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"), cited above; and Matthew's account is identical with Mark's.

As we have seen in this previous chapter, these divinely forgiving words ("Father, forgive them, etc.") were forged and interpolated into the gospel of Luke in a later century. It bears repeating that these words do NOT appear in the supposed "gospel" of Luke in the most ancient copies of Luke extant, and the FACT therefore cannot be escaped that these words were indeed added hundreds of years after the Gospel of Luke was written or composed. Our conjecture is that these words were added surreptitiously in the hope of overcoming the implication of Jesus' despair and loss of faith in God as he hung on the cross of execution—an implication that is clearly revealed in the words reported by Mark and Matthew.

After ruminating upon the many pieces and varied bits of evidence singled out for examination and study in the pages of this book, the Christian reader may be in a somewhat better position to judge whether he can any longer conscientiously accept the ancient Jewish Scriptures (which undeniably comprise an integral part of the "Christian" Bible) as a proper foundation for his own religious beliefs.

If the Old Testament is found wanting in this respect, and inasmuch as the entire Christian system of beliefs is based on the Genesis story of man's purported "sin" and his "fall" from grace, and upon the method of man's subsequent "redemption" and restoration to God's grace, then we cannot fail to conclude from these premises, that the great body of Christian "doctrines" which we have cherished as true for so long, must be summarily rejected as altogether misleading and invalid.

All that would be left to us as a consequence would be so-called "Christian" ethics and the God of Nature to believe in; but after all, are not these beliefs the very heart and vital essence of Christianity in its broadest and most universal sense? Belief in the validity of ethical values is at the inmost core of all religion, and this belief generally engenders the corollary belief in a God of lofty ethical stature and infinite love.

In my opinion, the groundwork of faith must be sought, as it was sought before there ever was a "Bible," and as it is sought even today where the Bible is unknown; that is to say, it must be sought in our hearts, in the manifestations of Godly wisdom and goodness all about us, and most of all in the whisperings and counsellings of that mysterious inner oracle that outspeaks all doubts, the oracle too that shouts down all merely "sectarian" claims and sectarian intolerance and prejudice as "ungodly."

Of one thing we may be sure: THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD must be beautiful. Though God dwells in shadows beyond our understanding, everything we can see and discover shows His excelling and matchless handiwork and His superb artistry, and displays vast and—to use a much-abused word—"providential" wisdom. Furthermore, the careful provision that God has made for the operation of the Cosmos at large and of our own relatively minuscule sphere, down to its most minute details, though these details are infinitely myriad and related too with infinite delicacy and balance, gives us tremendous assurance that He will probably have provided too for our immortal aspirations with equal far-seeing and loving care.

Of course, one must be willing to grant that there is always the outside possibility that even if the God of our faith exists—as I firmly believe—we as individuals may not be sufficiently significant in His eyes, to warrant His providing for the survival of our personalities beyond death. But it is my intuited conviction that a God who is possessed of the supreme wisdom and intelligence which is everywhere evident in the visible Universe, must have the attribute of goodness or good will and love in a measure equal to that wisdom and intelligence.

Such a God of love and compassion, I feel certain, would not awaken us briefly to the wondrous power of awareness and reason which we possess, and to the joyous contemplation of the beauty of His handiwork and then, turning as it were from a beneficent Jekyll into a monstrous Hyde, cruelly crush and annihilate us TIME WITHOUT END. It were more merciful by far if God had never given us life or had given us life only on such terms as the dinosaurs enjoyed it—that is, unconscious of their identity and incognizant of the beauty around them.

In the opinion of some, the fact that we can recall under hypnosis the most trivial details and events in our lives, seems to point to a provision for something beyond our present mortal state. Why, they argue, in the economy of Nature, would it be necessary to store such memories? They are laid away in the limbo of things forgot during our earthly sojourn, but if they are never to be used, why should such trivia be carefully registered and preserved at all?

Now even if the argument regarding the storage of memories in the human brain is not valid, we have certainly at the very least another amazing illustration of the power of UNCONSCIOUS matter to "remember," for what we call our subconscious is "unconscious" in the sense that it is not under any "conscious" control.

It is this power of unconscious matter that enables the bird and the mud wasp, each to build its nest untaught, the salmon to find the stream of his birth, the eel to find its parental pool, and the fertilized human ovum to recall, for the most part unerringly—and certainly unconsciously—the process of the evolution of its species, and to build a new human embryo, stage by complicated stage, though the process may very well duplicate the development of the species over a period of perhaps millions of years—a feat of memory that is truly bewildering and a source of wonderment.

To be sure, the evidence for the existence of God is all circumstantial, but it is evidence of such diversity, and in my opinion, evidence so compelling that I believe we may reasonably build our faith on this evidence. The evidence for God via so-called "revelation" in the Bible, in the Koran, and in other purportedly "sacred" Scriptures of other world religions, is by comparison very tenuous, very slight, highly questionable, and open to serious challenge. In addition, as often as not, the evidence of "revelation" in these sacred scriptures is often strongly negative, as we have seen again and again in former chapters.

As I have said, and now repeat, THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD must be beautiful, and what the Bible reveals about "God," be assured, is on the contrary often quite hideous, is sometimes morally revolting or highly reprehensible, is frequently confusing, ambiguous or contradictory, and is in many ways, unthinkable. Certainly if the Bible were God's authentic Word, it would display unerring accuracy and it would show God to be ever wise, noble, and loving—and this it does NOT do. Let us not go about believing things about God that are absurd, contradictory, or immoral. This is our earnest and continuing plea throughout the pages of this book. Let us discard the portrait of God which shows Him in a dark and forbidding light, or depicts Him as the slave of passion, or as spitefully vindictive.

Not only our belief in God, but any religious belief, I suggest, should have the searchlight of reason brought to bear upon it before it is accepted, EVEN ON FAITH. Any so-called religious belief should in addition be measured against that uncanny sense of right that inhabits within all of us, that same sense of right that "compelled" Jesus, despite his undoubted devotion to Judaism, to deny the validity of many of Judaism's religious practices and beliefs, and earned him the charge of blasphemy and the further charge that he was in close league with the Devil.

This same intuitive sense of right would have made Jesus deprecate and oppose many of the religious practices and beliefs of this day and age, had he been born in the Twentieth Century. His conception of religion was a passion for kindliness rather than a dull, routine devotion to creed, ritual and form.

Again, it is our inner sense of right, that inner oracle of which I spoke above, that makes us aware that religious truth is actually not the property of any particular church at all, and that any church group, denomination or sect, or any world religion which pretends that it has a monopoly of religious truth, or has the inside track or only path to God's peculiar favor, is very much and very certainly mistaken. Such a mistaken attitude, when insisted upon, makes for the worst kind of intolerance and arrogance, and leads sometimes to fanatical hate—traits that must be shunned, or which must appear vastly out of place in any religion that pretends to believe in LOVE as a First Principle or Prime Mover.

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A new look at the Bible tradition.
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